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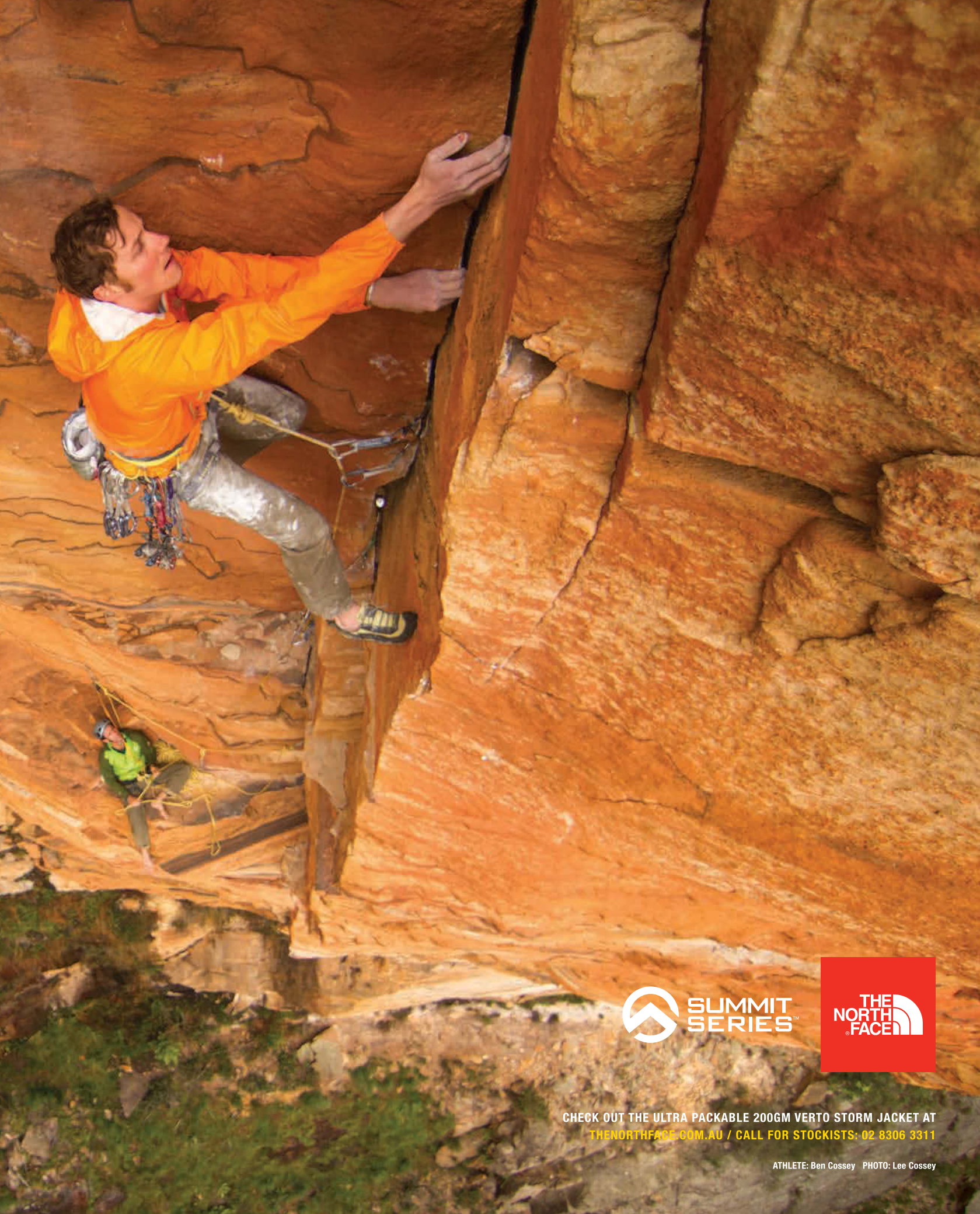


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The cut and design of these are amazing, it is hard to find a pair that fits me so well ... old school style works for this older shorter guy. So, hopefully your R&D group may find some way of bringing back this functional style and rugged piece of gear. Oh yeah, are they still covered by your legendary warranty and repair service?

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Christo Grayling,
Alberta, Canada and Baja, Mexico



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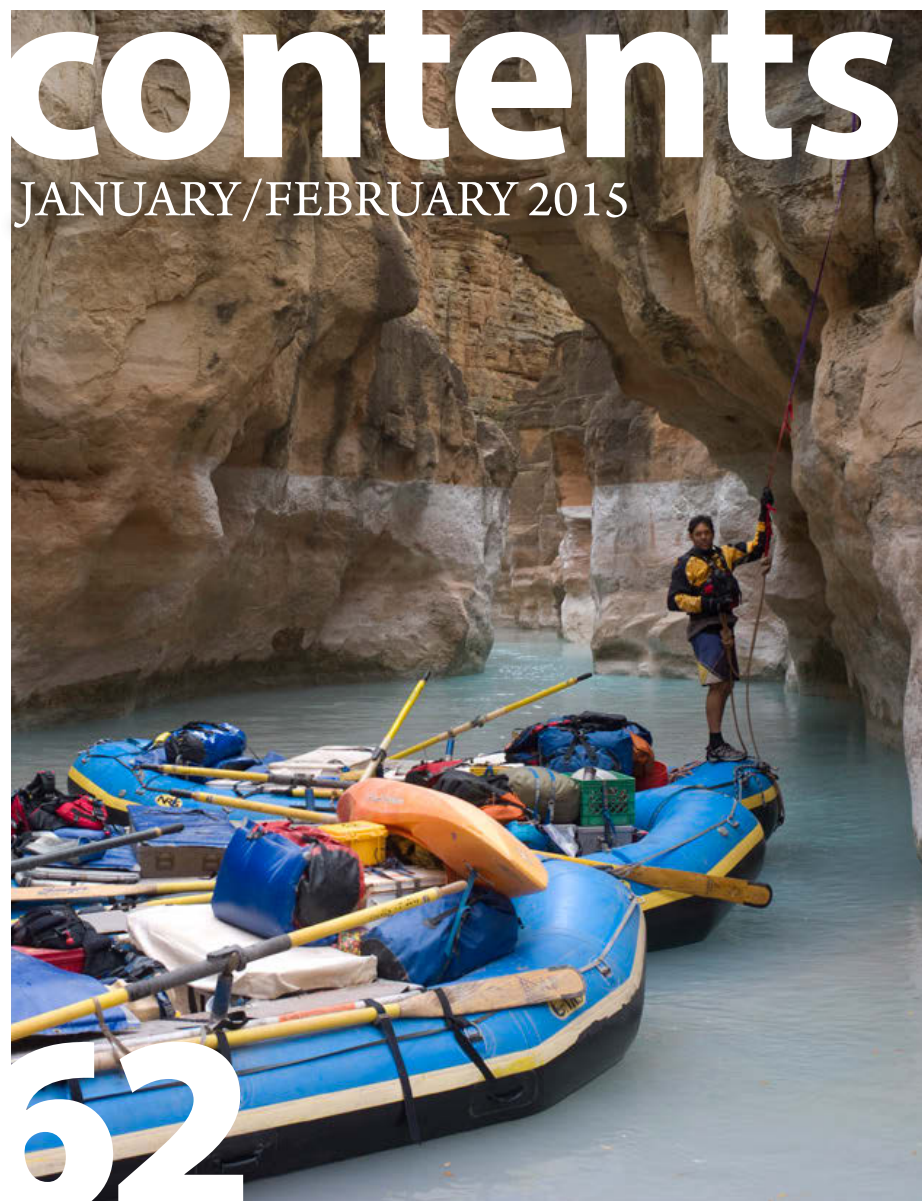


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On the cover. Paddlers at Havasu Creek, a tributary of the Colorado River.
// Forest Woodward

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A NEW WAY TO LIVE THE ADVENTURE

IT'S A NEW YEAR so fittingly this issue is new as well. We've tweaked your favourite active lifestyle magazine to kick off 2015 – our 20th Anniversary year – and we're confident you're going to like the subtle changes.

Over the past couple of years, we've watched the 'outdoors' become an increasingly multi-faceted experience. The traditional activities, such as hiking and paddling, are still incredibly popular, but have now been joined by the huge growth in two-wheeled adventure – specifically mountain biking and cycle touring – and vehicle-based adventures, primarily in the form of family camping trips, but also road trips to remote bike trails, hiking tracks, campsites or climbing crags.

All of these activities are massive, both in Australia and around the world, and with good reason; they all offer participants the chance to get out there and experience the outdoors in a different – but still amazing – way, bringing credence to the old adage of "each to their own."

So that's why we've introduced a new section called 'Out There' that's dedicated to paddling, MTB/cycle touring, outdoor road trips and female-specific adventure – all of which are written by experts in these fields.

It's an exciting time for those of us obsessed with the outdoor lifestyle. With these new activities in the magazine we will broaden our already excellent coverage of all things outdoors, while continuing to offer readers what you've liked best about *AG Outdoor* for the past 20 years: inspiring adventure travel stories, how-to skills guides and expert gear tests.

In short, it's the same *AG Outdoor* but just better – and still focused on what we've always done best: encouraging people to get out there – any which way you can!

giveaway



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The Yakima SweetRoll makes loading your boat easy, thanks to the integrated rollers in the rear saddles. Check out our full review of the SweetRoll on page 111 of this issue.
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LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Hi there. I've only recently taken up buying AG Outdoor but I wish I'd been onto this magazine earlier as it has a lot of great reading. I read with interest the article 'Go Long' (Sept-Oct 14 issue) which contained advice about taking on multi-day treks. I was disappointed that there was no mention of joining a bushwalking club. I started out as a solo bushwalker but wanted to do more, and since joining my local club I've been on day walks, overnights, and was lucky enough to trek the Larapinta Trail end to end. I've met some great people and have been able to build on my bushwalking skills, including navigation, food prep and gear selection, and am hoping to start leading walks next year. I would love for AGO to encourage others to join their local club as I'm sure they'd benefit in the same way I have.

Kate Morse, VIC

Congratulations Kate, you've won an awesome The North Face Duffel bag, (RRP\$170).



Write to us for your chance to win adventure gear for your shed! Drop us an email at outdoor@bauer-media.com.au

IMPROVING THE MESSAGE

I agree wholeheartedly with two of the letters in the Nov-Dec 2014 issue. Firstly I agree with Matthew about the Big W in Patagonia. It would have to be on a Top 10 list of multi-day walks in the world. I traversed it with my daughter and her partner and was particularly impressed with the camping / accommodation options at the refugios for the overnight stops. With food and drinks available it means we could enjoy the walk without heavy packs, even though we prepared our own basic meals. Dale also makes a good point about the maps which would embellish many of the articles – in particular "On River Time" by Mike Elliott in the last issue.

Thanks also for the New Zealand Cycle Trail Guide. We are doing NZ in February so it will be very useful in choosing a ride or two.

Jeff Coward, via email

ALWAYS INSPIRING

Having grown up in Germany in the Bavarian Alps I developed a love for hiking and trekking from a very early age. Since I moved to Brisbane two years ago, I have been eagerly exploring all that South East Queensland has to offer. Tasmania however is still on my 'absolutely-need-to-go' list. Inspired by your special feature on the Top 10 World Treks, I now cannot wait to tackle the Western Arthurs Traverse. The rugged and breathtakingly beautiful wilderness areas of Tassie seem to radiate a special allure that I just cannot resist.

In addition to reading about all

the cool adventures out there, I also particularly enjoy AGO's Gear Zone. In the spirit of a true adventure girl, I can spend hours looking at the newest outdoor gear but shopping for a party dress gives me the cold sweats. But like so many others, I am working a corporate job and only get to relish the outdoors in my free time. So please keep up the good work and continue bringing fond memories and inspiration for new adventures to our living rooms!

Silvia Bunk, via email

ETHICAL ADVENTURE

I have just finished reading the July-Aug 14 issue of AGO and wanted to say thanks for the great magazine and to let you know that it has ended up in some strange places. I got a great surprise when I made it to town and a friend had gone to the trouble and expense of sending this edition to me. AGO has always raised awareness of ethical approaches to adventure (such as the story on hiking in Nepal, May-June issue) and this issue on wild escapes is no different. I thought some readers might be interested to know that taking on a volunteer role is a great way to experience new adventures in an ethical way.

I'm currently volunteering in Tawatana Village on Makira Island. The village has no power, running water or vehicles. Communication is by HF radio or satphone and email when we get into town every couple of months. As a result life has been simplified a little and I have found that, like a multi-day

walk, this 'de-cluttering' seems to highlight the achievements and also serves to make appreciating the world around us so much easier.

I have had some fantastic experiences and have done the hardest single day's walking in my life in the untouched tropical forest inland from the village. I have also spent hours exploring a local cave that provides the source for the local stream. Recently I had a chance to visit a nearby island that has been visited by local people for possibly thousands of years but is uninhabited due to the lack of fresh water. Snorkelling in the protective reefs, watching the dolphins in the crystal clear water reefs and exploring the island was idyllic.

Importantly, while I have been able to have all these great experiences I have been able to live within the community and support them to achieve their goal of managing their local environment and protecting their forest from unsustainable logging.

My placement is for seven months through Australian Volunteers International but there are numerous organisations providing short and long term placements and opportunities for people looking for ethical adventure while contributing valuable support. There are also now a range of operators offering the chance to participate in important conservation projects across the world as part of your holiday. I highly recommend that next time you are looking for an ethical adventure option, consider volunteering.

John Gavin, Solomon Islands



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MAIN PHOTO: Machermo, Gokyo Valley, Everest Region

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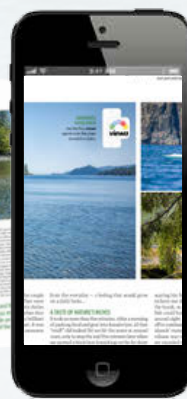
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Victoria's Great Trails

THE VICTORIAN Government has shown, once again, how pro-active it is when it comes to outdoor activities with the launch of its Great Trails Victoria website, www.greattrailsvictoria.com.au.

The Great Trails are a mixture of walking, cycling and mountain biking trails dotted throughout the state and the new website is designed to both showcase these trails, and also get adventurous visitors to the state out there to enjoy them. At launch, there are 15 trails on the website, separated into "Walking", "Cycling" and "Mountain biking" categories. The trails were selected to ensure a wide range of experiences, from easy (think: family-based) rail trail cycle tours, through to the more extreme, such as the Wilsons Promontory hiking circuit and Buller Bike Park for mountain bikers.

The website contains interactive maps of the trails, as well as downloadable GPS data files, detailed guides

to each trail, itineraries and plenty of awesome photography to motivate people to try a trail. There is also plenty of information on essential things like equipment hire, tour operators, accommodation, etc. At the time of going to press, AG Outdoor was informed there will also a mobile and tablet version of the website, due for launch in December 2014.

The trail list reads like a Victorian bucket list, and includes such iconic outdoor locations as the Great Ocean Walk, the 40km Great Walhalla Alpine Trail, the Forrest Mountain Bike Trails, the East Gippsland, Warburton and Murray to Mountains rail trails, the You Yangs Mountain Bike Park and more. The trails ensure visitors get a taste of all the different landscapes Victoria contains.

This is a brilliant development for the outdoors community and hopefully will prompt other states to do the same. Here's hoping!



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WORLD EXPEDITIONS' LARAPINTA TRAIL AWARD AND NEW OZ BROCHURE

World Expeditions, was recently awarded the coveted Best Travel Product for its Larapinta Trail by the Australian Society of Travel Writers.

World Expeditions pioneered the Larapinta Trail and operated the first commercial trek in 1995. Last year, the company launched semi-permanent campsites on the trail, allowing walkers unprecedented levels of comfort while trekking in this iconic part of Australia. World Expeditions' Larapinta Trail is one of the Eight Great Walks of Australia and is the company's top selling trek globally.

World Ex has also been busy producing an all-new range of adventures for Australia-New Zealand for 2015, including a range of multi-activity adventures, more cycling holidays, family-based itineraries, and a self-guided option on Tassie's famous Overland Track.

The Overland Track remains World Expeditions' most popular walk in Tasmania and adding this self-guided option makes for even more choices for those of all abilities who are keen to tackle the walk, according to World Ex Domestic General Manager, Chris Buykx.

"The self-guided option is ideal for more confident walkers, with World Expeditions taking care of all the time consuming logistical arrangements and provision of equipment," he said.

Other highlights of the new adventures are: Cycle Kayak Walk Northern Tasmania, which combines kayaking on lakes near Cradle Mountain, cycling the country backroads around Sheffield and walking in the magnificent Tarkine rainforests; the South East Queensland Scenic Rim Trail; the six-day Kakadu Walking Adventure; and 11 cycling itineraries in New Zealand.

For more info, see www.worldexpeditions.com

MTB series for regional NSW cities

The Evocities MTB Series is an all-new race series that will be hosted by some of NSW's major regional centres. Orange, Albury, Bathurst, Dubbo, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga will each play host to a round of this series (there will also be one event, at the new Wylde MTB Park, just outside of Sydney), which will significantly boost local economies and also showcase these "evocities" to outside visitors.

The Evocities concept is based around seven major regional centres in NSW – the aforementioned six, plus Armidale – and promotes these centres as options for city residents looking to move out of the hustle-bustle while still enjoying all the essential services that these major centres offer.

Mayor of Dubbo, Councillor Mathew Dickerson, is one of the driving forces behind the event series, and sees it as an exciting opportunity for riders keen to sample some of these towns' trails, plus as a way to promote the Evocities brand.

"The Evocities MTB Series will establish a high performance pathway for mountain bike racing in regional NSW, raising the standard of the sport, increasing participation and creating a unique series of national significance," Councillor Dickerson said.

The series benefits from great sponsorship, with Fairfax Media as the major sponsor, along with Fly Orana, NAB, QantasLink, Sydney University School of Rural Health, Maas Group Properties and Prime 7. There is also an impressive combined prize money total of over \$80,000. This will entice riders, but it's the extra benefits of exposing out-of-town visitors to these regional centres that Councillor Dickerson sees as being equally as important.

"The high expected number of participants in each event, as well as supporters, spectators and other visitors, will generate major economic benefits for each of the seven race locations which include six Evocities. The Evocities MTB Series provides a unique platform to promote the opportunities and lifestyle available in regional NSW to a national audience," Councillor Dickerson said.

The single non-Evocity round, at Wylde MTB Park, will be hosted by experienced MTB event hosts, Chocolate Foot, with company director, Joe Ward, is thrilled with the opportunity.

"Having grown up and lived in regional NSW, I think it's excellent that a series like this has been developed and we really look forward giving regional participants a great race at the newly-built Wylde MTB Park at Western Sydney."

EVOCITIES MTB DATES

Sunday 15 February
Orange 250 min
Saturday 14 March
Albury 6 hour
Sunday 12 April
Wylde 4 hour / 7 hour
Sunday 31 May
Bathurst 4 hour / 6 hour
Sunday 12 July
Dubbo 6 hour
Saturday 8 August
Tamworth 5 hour
Sunday 6 September
Wagga 6 hour

RACE CATEGORIES

- Sydney University School of Rural Health Open Male
- QantasLink Open Female
- Fly Orana Masters Male (40-49)
- Masters Female (40-49)*
- NAB Super Masters Male (50+)
- NAB Super Masters Female (50+)
- Maas Group Properties Male Pairs
- Hogs Breath Female Pairs
- Fly Orana Mixed Pairs



WALK FOR KOALAS

The 2015 WildEndurance team walking challenge is aiming to raise funds to track and save koalas from extinction in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The challenge, run by the Wilderness Society, is in its eighth year and, this year, has partnered with Science for Wildlife to assist in raising the funds.

The event will be held over the weekend of May 2-3, 2015 and registration is now open, with options of participating as a team of two through to a team of seven. Participants can choose the 50km walk/run or the full-monty 100km challenge. The event track will take entrants past and through plenty of areas of high cultural and ecological value, as well as past the habitation areas of more than 400 different animals, including the koala, long-nosed potoroo, gold bell frogs and rare Blue Mountains water skink.

WildEndurance Co-ordinator, Sarah Williams, said the event offers participants not only a personal, physical challenge, but also the chance to connect with this wild, natural area as they walk through it.

"WildEndurance is a tough physical challenge, but it is also about communities coming together to make a real difference to effect long-term change, and transform Australia into a society that protects, respects and connects with the natural world that sustains us," said Ms Williams.

"The protection of Australian wildlife is one of our main focuses and researchers at Science for Wildlife have stressed the importance of finding and assessing exactly what is left of the koala population in this area," said Ms Williams.

"You can participate either as a team walker or a team sponsor – or even both! As a team walking event, you can share the experience with friends, family, work-mates and colleagues."

To enter, go to www.wildendurance.org.au. For more information on the Blue Mountains Koala Project, see www.scienceforwildlife.org

Burke and Wills Trek 2015

Join fellow adventurers – and a few camels – and retrace history along the desert tracks of two of Australia's most famous outback explorers.



TAKE A HIKE
Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to see a short film from the Burke and Wills Trek.



THE INAUGURAL BIG Burke and Wills Trek was a huge success with organisers confident it will become a bucket list outback adventure for those who like a challenge and to experience part of our pioneering history.

The Trek is a full recreation of the initial part of the original 1860 expedition after Burke, Wills, Gray and King left Cooper Creek bound for the Gulf to be the first men to cross the continent south to north. The Trek follows as close as possible to Burke and Wills' known route, and camps in places where Burke and Wills were known to have camped. However unlike Burke and Wills, the Trek is supported by modern technology, vehicles and a full support crew. The Trekkers experienced the vastness and isolation of the areas that Burke and Wills walked across, but knowing there was a hot

cooked breakfast when they awoke, a fresh lunch and a shady lunch stop each day, as well as a hot meal and a tent set up and waiting for them when they got into camp at day's end. There was no final tragedy on this expedition, only a grand celebration at Birdsville when the Trek was over.

The Trek left from the Dig Tree on Cooper Creek on August 20, and crossed 330km of untracked before reaching the Birdsville Pub 11 days later.

Trekkers crossed three deserts – the Strzelecki, Sturt's Stony, and part of the Simpson – with the Trekkers taking in amazing landscapes seen by very few people. The Trek was fully supported with three freshly prepared meals a day provided courtesy of the Australian Army catering unit. There was also a great support and volunteer team of around 35 people keeping the Trek moving

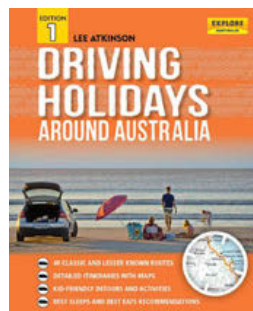
forward with daily campsite moves, and maintaining the radio communications network vital for managing the Trek and keeping Trekkers safe throughout the journey.

The Trek also had six camels – the same number of camels the original Burke and Wills expedition party had with them when they left Cooper Creek.

This amazing Trek is on again from August 16-26, with shorter half Trek options also available.

There will be a number of information nights held in Paddy Pallin stores around Australia in late February and early March, 2015, and all details will be available on the Trek website when these are finalised.

Further information can be found on the Trek website www.burkeandwillstrek.com.au

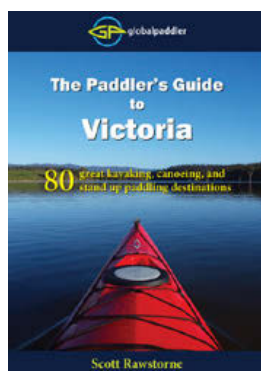


DRIVING HOLIDAYS AROUND AUSTRALIA

LEE ATKINSON

This excellent guidebook from one of Australia's experienced travellers contains a road trip for everyone, whether it's a weekend away or a fantastic outback expedition. Each trip is profiled extensively, with the best time to travel, itinerary options and national parks, plus accommodation listings and 'kids' spot' section as well. Brilliant!

Explore Australia, \$39.95

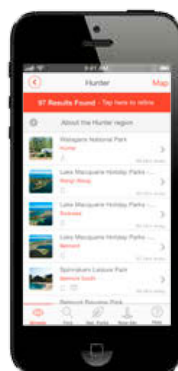


THE PADDLER'S GUIDE TO VICTORIA

SCOTT RAWSTORNE

Yet another awesome Paddler's Guide, this time to Victoria, with more than 80 paddling destinations detailed inside. Each destination description includes GPS coordinates, maps, historical information and points of interest. As well, author Scott Rawstorne offers expert on paddling equipment. An essential for all paddlers.

Global Paddler, \$39.95

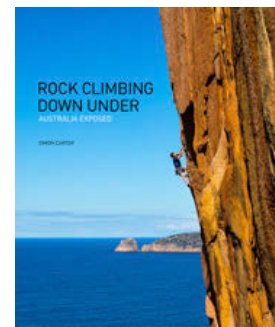


AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC DISCOVER NSW APP

AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC

This all-new app from AG covers everything you need to know when visiting New South Wales. The app includes info on national parks, points of interest, campsites and associated contact details for each. You also gain access to AG's archive of stories and images. Yep, we might be a bit biased, but we reckon it's the perfect app for planning that next outdoor road trip.

\$7.95 Available from the iTunes store.



ROCK CLIMBING DOWN UNDER: AUSTRALIA EXPOSED

SIMON CARTER

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TAKE A LONG LINE

Franklin River, Tasmania

Tassie's Franklin River has some incredibly gnarly rapids, but none quite rival The Churn, which is always portaged. The Churn finishes abruptly – after this series of challenging sections – with a 90-degree drop off a waterfall. Manoeuvring the rafts to this point takes plenty of skill; the guides need to ensure that the rafts end up at the bottom of the falls in one piece, preferably with all gear still inside. It took us about 30 minutes to portage all the gear up and over a cliffside path opposite the guides, then another 20 minutes for the guides to carefully lower the rafts down the end rapid.

Camera: Canon EOS 7D

Lens: Sigma 17-50 f/2.8

Shutter: 1/800

Aperture: f/8

Justin Walker

www.outsidemedia.com.au





NEVER STOP EXPLORING™





Sporting sole

Very few brands get to say they reinvented the wheel, but in the world of sandals, Teva is one of them.

WORDS CAROLYN BARRY PHOTOS COURTESY TEVA

WHILE SANDALS were probably the first type of shoes ever worn, they hadn't been used for outdoor activities (probably) since the Ancient Greeks. But, in 1984, along came Colorado River guide and geophysicist by trade, Mark Thatcher. Back then, paddlers had only two options for river shoes: sneakers, which get heavy, stay sodden for ages and trap pebbles, or thongs, which are flimsy and break easily. Fed up with the limited choice, Mark designed a sandal that would withstand rugged riverbeds but also be sturdy and quick drying. He invented the sports sandal: Teva, pronounced (half of you will lose the bet) teh-vah, not tee-vah, after the Hebrew word for nature.

Mark set up shop in Flagstaff, Arizona, about a one and a half hour drive to the Grand Canyon, and sold the sandals to the grassroots paddling community. The first iteration, the 'Hurricane', was a hit and the brand's popularity spread from there.

Kayakers and rafters alike flocked to get a hold of this shoe made for their sport. Its unique features – an ankle strap for keeping the shoe on, a rugged and grippy base for traction on slippery rocks, an open design to easily lose pebbles, nylon straps for quick drying, and the use of Velcro (which was only just making it to the market in watch bands and sneakers) – made it the perfect river shoe.

Initially, Tevas had a thong-style front, but this was altered to a cross-the-toe version, which then included a linking strap to the ankle for support to walk on rough terra firma. Its anti-microbial foot bed and 'spider rubber' outer also set it apart.

Teva has been associated with shoe company giant Deckers – which got its start from its popular thongs 'decked' with colours – from the early days, when it began to licence and distribute Teva shoes in 1985. Deckers, which owns brands including Ugg Australia, Ahnu and Sanuk, was a kind of kindred shoe spirit, and in 2002 it acquired outright ownership of its 'sole' mate. Mark still played a role in the brand until around 2006 but after a hiatus recently went on to establish the Sazzi shoe brand.

Tevas were created for function, not beauty, but

over the last 30 years as outdoor chic has become the fashion brands like Teva have listened to consumers and heeded the broader demand – these sandals have expanded from remote rivers to sartorial street wear. Tevas have stepped into other shoe categories, including neoprene booties, enclosed river shoes and urban boots.

"Innovation is a core value. We rely on innovation to deliver solutions to problems," says Pete Worley, who was head of the Teva brand for six years, before stepping up to become president of Deckers Asia Pacific in Hong Kong in 2011.

A key part of keeping up with what consumers want is doing a lot of research, "To identify new and evolving wants and needs," says Pete, "and then deliver design, material, construction and manufacturing innovations that respond to those wants and needs."

Indeed, the brand works hard to exude a youthful energy and fun, with much of its promotion focusing on excitement and adventure of general outdoor activities. It's even trying to bring back some, ah, interesting trends – like wearing socks and sandals. It's come a long way from its niche of river footwear.

"Teva has evolved and expanded in new directions over the years, but has always remained unconditionally committed to its heritage as a brand that celebrates freedom of expression and the adventurous spirit in all of us," says Pete.

Like most outdoor brands, Teva's shoes are manufactured in Asia – mostly China and Vietnam – with some models made in South America for the American market. It has a good reputation for corporate social responsibility, including environmental assessments of greenhouse gas creation and life-cycle analyses of its products.

But the brand has never forgotten its roots. In an ode to 30 years of sports sandals, Teva has released a line of 'original' sandals, some of which are more along the fashion lines. But, says Pete, "Teva's Originals Collection, inspired by Mark Thatcher's very first prototype, remains a core component of the brand's core business."



FAST FACTS

PARENT COMPANY: Deckers Outdoor Corporation

BASED IN: California, USA

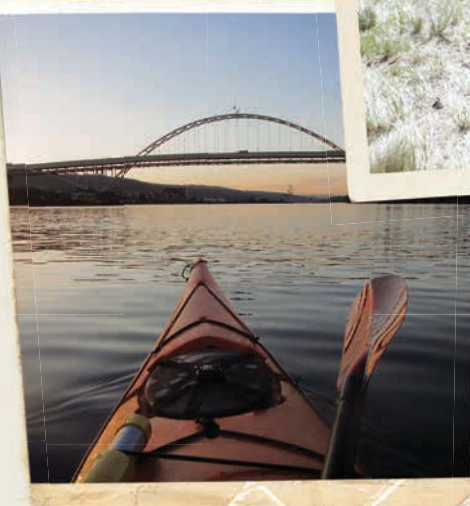
CLAIM TO FAME: Inventing the first outdoor sports sandal

KEY PRODUCTS: Hurricane and Terra Fi – the first classic river sandals

Mark designed a sandal that would withstand rugged riverbeds but also be sturdy and quick drying.

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PHOTO CREDIT / Dan Holz
Osprey employee, Mychal, has no shortage of trails for his endurance run in the canyons of Indian Creek, UT.



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The North Shore trails are tight, twisting and spectacular to ride.



ACTION INSTINCT
Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to watch a video of the Rocky Mountain Instinct in BC's epic Monashee Mountains.



More than a Rocky ride...

Imagine riding Vancouver's North Shore with Rocky Mountain Bicycles' Wade Simmons and ex-Olympian rider Andreas Hestler. Talk about feeling out of your depth.

WORDS **JUSTIN WALKER**

PHOTOS **BRENDON PURDY, MARCUS RIGA AND JUSTIN WALKER**

LIKE EVERY OTHER mountain biker on the planet, for me, riding the many trails of Vancouver's North Shore always seemed like a dream. Visions of the crazy ladders, bridges and drop-offs that litter the densely forested slopes of "The Shore" – and of the riders who made the area famous, such as Wade Simmons and Dan Cowan – made it seem like a faraway, untouchable fairyland of mountain biking, one that I'd have to be content to experience through Vimeo or YouTube. Then I got lucky...

As we all know, luck is a fickle thing... much like the reality of riding the North Shore, as I was to oh-so painfully discover. Riding with me would be ex-Olympian Andreas Hestler and Wade Simmons himself, so this experience was on a far more epic scale than my idea of just "going for a ride".

When I first met Wade at Rocky Mountain Bikes' HQ in northern Vancouver and said I was here "for a factory tour, and a bit of a ride", his response was: "Do you wanna do a tour, or do you wanna ride?" I must've missed the emphasis on "ride" and it's meaning to the man rated the Godfather of Freeride mountain biking.

At this point I should have asked myself if I wanted to put myself on the mental and physical edge for a few hours, negotiating by far the most challenging trails I had ever ridden, and then, hopefully, return (in one piece) to drag myself

around the amazing Rocky Mountain factory (see Factory of Dreams, page 27-28).

I was 20kg over my riding weight and had done minimal riding over the past couple of years due to several lower-leg injuries. Yet here I was, about to embark on my first ride on a 29er (albeit a sweet Rocky Mountain Instinct MSL 999), replete with brakes set up North American-style (as in, reverse to how we run them in Oz). I had been asked by the mechanic regarding brake setup but had not listened properly and just said "they'd be okay". Something I would regret. In short, I was incredibly, exceptionally, unprepared for what was coming. I should have piked out, right there and then, but of course I didn't. What a fool...

A SHORE THING

Vancouver's North Shore is held in near-mythical regard by the world's mountain bikers. This area includes three mountains – Fromme, Cypress and Seymour – and myriad trails, ranging from expert black diamond-rated, to accessible green-rated trails. The North Shore's steep, forested slopes, deep ravines, fallen trees, and rocky outcrops that include some impressively high drop-offs meant, in the early days, trail builders had to innovate. The result is a trail type – and to an extent, a riding style – that has become synonymous with "The Shore". Trails in the area include hand-built (and narrow)

FACTORY OF DREAMS



Rocky Mountain Bicycles has been around for 33 years, starting with the ethos of wanting to build bikes "we want to ride here", as in the North Shore. Since 1981, the brand has become synonymous with mountain biking and its many disciplines. For years, the company produced bikes out of its Vancouver factory, before moving frame production (like most bike brands) overseas (around 80% of the company's bikes are still assembled in Canada, however). Even though the frames are manufactured overseas, the design, engineering and prototype testing is done in-house by a team of four engineers located at Rocky's North Shore Vancouver HQ.

Anja Koehler, Marketing Coordinator, was my host as we undertook the tour – a real eye-opener for any MTBer, with the HQ and factory containing some innovative bike designing technology, plus a bit of history here and there. As we walked past one of the meeting rooms I spied a piece of RM history with a unique Aussie connection: Wade Simmons' 2002 Red Bull Rampage trophy that he won in Jindabyne sits proudly on display here. Other displays include a series of Rocky Mountain frames – including an ultra-rare build from frame-maker Derek Bailey. Dubbed the "Bill B", this frame is one of only two of its kind and has some cool metalwork, including some amazingly detailed lugs. Other iconic RM frames are also on display, and whet my appetite for the visit behind the back door of the office, that leads to the fabrication facility itself.

Designing a mountain bike is no easy task. The sport itself requires a plethora of things that must be spot-on, ranging from frame component clearances and seemingly simple things like where to fit the cable clips to avoid fouling, through to the frame's durability in real-world conditions.

FACTORY OF DREAMS (CONTINUED)

This prototype testing needs to be done for every single model the company produces. To this end, Rocky Mountain has a facility that resolves all of these issues.

As Anja and I move into the factory, she explains the design process.

"How it works is, the engineers design it [the frame] and then the first step is to make an aluminium prototype – whether you want to have a carbon bike or not – and then it is tested, ridden, and tested again, with modifications made where needed... Once they decide that is how they want it, then the carbon version is designed from that final prototype. With the carbon version, you use a plastic prototype [made using a 3D printer] before you make a final carbon version which is tested on all the machines."

And it is these test machines that grab your eye – especially the one used to test frame fatigue. On my visit, a prototype carbon-fibre Thunderbolt frame is attached to the fatigue tester, which tests the frame for the maximum weight it can withstand before cracking. We move along to the next machine where Billy, a long-time RM employee, joins Anja. They explain that this rig replicates the pedalling process, and how many pedalling "cycles" (measured in time and pedal rate) the frame can withstand – the frame in this rig had already withstood 100,000 cycles, or the equivalent of four, 24-hour days.

The tour is relatively short but exciting (I glimpse a few other prototypes of yet to be released bikes, but am sworn to secrecy). Besides the brilliant engineering work that goes on back here, the fact that everyone at Rocky Mountain HQ is both proud and passionate about the brand really shines through. Knowing just how much thought, work and countless hours of testing goes into building the bike you pay for in your local bike shop makes that initial outlay a sound investment.



The Instinct 999 MSL was bullet-fast, but probably too fast for my skill set...

timber bridges, fallen logs utilised as ravine and creek overpasses, and timber "ladders" (often high off the ground) that take riders on a twisting ride above the forest. Add in natural obstacles such as said boulder drop-offs and an endless supply of slippery tree roots and fallen timber, and you have highly technical trails that are a considerable challenge. It's here that Wade cut his teeth, on the way to becoming one of the world's best riders.

It's easy to see how riding in this region would up your skill level to world-class – and why it is used by Rocky Mountain Bicycles when developing its bikes. Just a 20-minute drive from the Rocky Mountain factory and another 10 minutes getting bikes and gear sorted saw us plunge instantly into a darkly shadowed, steep and sharply undulating trail. It was, I found out, one of Wade's favourites; for me, it was one of the scariest. I announced my "intermediate" riding skills pretty much in the first five minutes when one of the riders in front of me stopped suddenly, causing me to grab the brakes, and, thanks to the reversed levers, over I went. Andreas was behind me and asked if I was okay – which wouldn't be the last time he asked that question – and, surprisingly,

besides a mouthful of dirt and grass, I was.

That was pretty much the trend of the day: the Instinct 999 MSL I was riding was bullet-fast, but probably too fast for my skill set to keep up with (see A natural Instinct, page 29). The Instinct put my "old school" perception of 29ers to rest with its manoeuvrability and forgiving handling. It was brilliant; tall drop-offs and quick descents and climbs were easily nailed – I just had to hang on.

LIVING HISTORY

During our ride Wade and Andreas stopped often, both so I could catch up and also to show me some of the original bridges and log crossings that had been built back in the early days of trail building. Some of them seemed ludicrously high but, having seen a raft of videos on riders such as Wade and other North Shore guns, I knew they were rideable. Just not by me.

A small amount of climbing up rock-strewn sections tempered the mad downhill pace on occasion, which was further slowed with a bit of hike-a-bike as we scrambled over huge logs or jumped across creek beds to link up with other trails on our way down the mountain.

For me, the three-hour ride was spent in a near-constant state of fear, boosted by a huge adrenaline rush midway as we tackled the most beautifully flowing, loam-padded piece of singletrack I have ever ridden. Here, I couldn't stop grinning; the Instinct was fantastically quick, and I was getting my head around the reversed brake



levers as I swooped around huge tree ferns, rolled semi-smoothly over bloody steep – and large – boulders, and managed to be only 10 seconds behind the group at the end of that section. For a brief, mad, exultant moment, with the memory of just how effectively I nailed that section, a thought passed through my mind: *Was I actually taking the first steps to becoming a Shore rider already?* As it turned out, that thought was a ridiculous one. . .

THE FINAL ACT

Our last trail section was a step up from the previous flowing lines, although not quite as daunting as the first third of the ride. But I was still just hanging on for most of the time, relying on the bike and some luck, with one slightly scary crash my only down-point – until, that is, the end.

I am sure Wade and Andreas have seen some pretty amusing crashes during their respective competitive careers, and also as Rocky Mountain ambassadors, but I doubt they've seen a head-over-handlebars crash executed with quite as much finesse as mine at the end of a ride. I had been racing – fast – to catch up with the group and could just see the light at the end of the trail as I rode through the last section of dark forest. Exiting the shadows, and before my eyes could adjust, the trail turned sharply to the right to avoid a one-metre drop onto the footpath where the others were waiting. I went straight over the edge and nailed the brakes Oz-style, with plenty of unfortunate emphasis on what was actually the

front brake. I pitched myself, with my still-attached bike, over on my head. Even more impressive was how I managed to land in a crumpled heap right at Wade's feet. The guys were concerned about me. . . but I was more concerned about the bike I had just tried to bury in solid concrete. Never have the words "What a ride!" seemed more apt.

THE ULTIMATE MEMORY

As I rolled down the tarred road to our shuttle vehicles, my mind was going even faster than I had on the trails, trying to make sense of what had been one of the most full-on scary but exciting experiences of my life. I had ridden well above my skill level, crashed more in three hours than in the previous three years, picked up a heap of bruises and some very impressive scratches and gouges, but, thanks to the brilliantly balanced bike I was riding, had managed to successfully ride with a balance of utter terror and rushes of adrenalin flooding my mind the whole way.

When I lobbied at the Air Canada check-in desk at Vancouver Airport later that day (after the factory tour and one last coffee at Rocky HQ) I must have looked a sorry sight, with a still-bewildered expression on my face and bruises and scratches on my arms and legs, and across my face. The check-in attendant asked what happened, and I only had to utter "I just rode the North Shore with Rocky Mountains' Wade Simmons" for her to smile knowingly, and deliver the final bonus to a truly epic day: a Business Class upgrade. . .

A NATURAL INSTINCT

The Rocky Mountain Instinct 999 MSL I rode features RM's innovative Ride-9 system. This allows riders to alter the bike's geometry and rear shock leverage ratio according to their riding style and/or conditions. You simply rotate the two interlocking chips in the shock mount to adjust angles and shock stroke. (My bike was set in "Neutral")

The Neutral Ride-9 setting meant I never felt like I was going to pitch forward – even over the steepest obstacles – but the geometry wasn't too slack so as to affect the bike's climbing ability. For those after a bike that could tackle some serious trails, but also be happy in a 100km marathon or 24-hour team event, the Instinct is a top option. For Australian stockists of Rocky Mountain Bikes, see www.adventurebrands.com.au

For RM's bike range, see www.bikes.com

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Air Canada flies direct from Sydney to Vancouver. See www.aircanada.com

More info: For North Shore riding, check out www.mountainbikebc.ca

AG Outdoor was a guest of Destination British Columbia (au.britishcolumbia.travel) and the Canadian Tourism Commission (au-keepexploring.canada.travel)

The quiet achievers

Sometimes outdoor adventures don't go to plan. That's when you need to call on The A-Team.

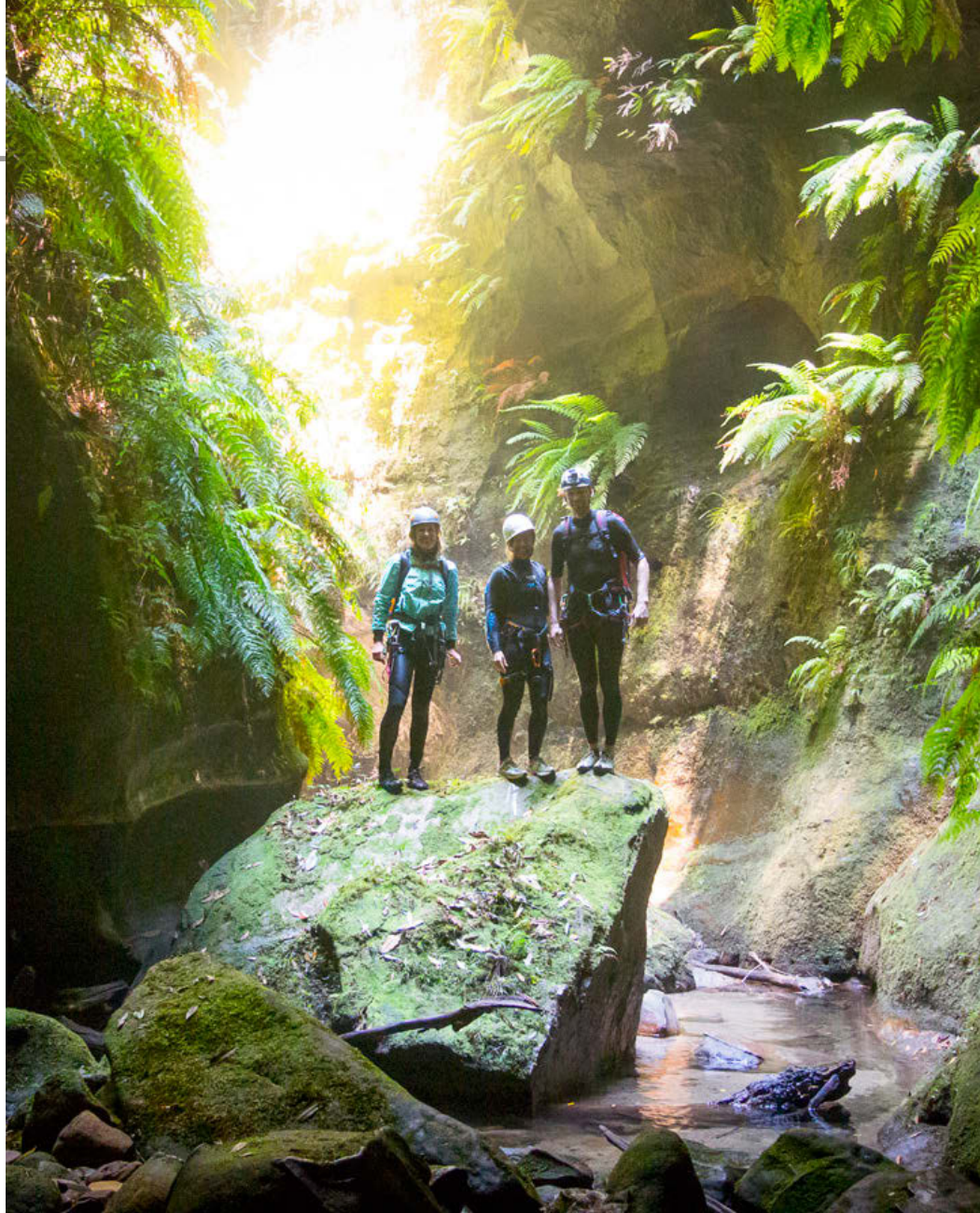
WORDS FLIP BYRNES

THREE FRIENDS STANDING on a rock, inside Thunder Canyon, unaware they'd be spending the night together, nursing one with a broken vertebrae and two broken ribs. It's experiences like this that create the strongest bonds between us, and provide memories and stories to last a lifetime. Risk and reward, it's a fine balance #friends #life #adventure.

Steve, the type who is born to climb, sent me this photo recently, along with what it means to him. The photo captures a moment, a mood in time. A spectacular day in the Blue Mountains canyons, green light filtering through sandstone rocks, small fingers of rays a salutation from land above. All was good, exploring the labyrinth of gorges that snake through gully floors. It's otherworldly in there – and not for the faint hearted. There are technical abseils, frigid pools and slick boulders scattered as though flung from an angry giants' hand.

In our quartet, I happily admit to being the weakest link, helmet akimbo, landing on my fellow climbers after rock sliding, more wobbly donkey than moves like Jagger. But no fear, as I'm surrounded by pros. Steve has climbed the Blue Mountains for years, Till just summited an 8000m Himalayan peak, and Kat is a supreme climbing and ski guiding machine. All marvelling at the delights Mother Nature has laid out for us at every canyon bend.

But Mother Nature is a tempestuous woman. One moment offering waterfalls, glowworms and Caribbean coloured pools. The next, as unyielding and unfeeling as stone. For a brief but crucial moment, her relationship with Kat falls apart. Near Thunder Gorge's exit, Kat abseils. It should be easy, but the rope swings at an odd angle, tossing her under an overhang.



The impact is audible – the thud of flesh meeting rock. She reappears in the pool below, gasping in agony, barely able to move. With no phone or satellite reception for the emergency beacon on the ravine floor, Steve acts quickly, leaving us the down jacket and emergency kit before hiking upwards to call for help.

There's only one thing to do. Talk. And despite the circumstances we almost have fun on our small rock, Kat and I. Kat is what you could call a captive audience, desperate to be entertained. I'm desperate to keep her conscious. If this is Kat at her worst, it's still more spirited and positive than many people's best. For three hours she never complains, despite shivering with spasms of pain. But amidst chat of trash TV, skiing and boys, we're both waiting for one thing. Help.

Suddenly, a branch like a javelin ricochets down the canyon and splits on a nearby rock. Wind wreaks havoc, helicopter rotor blades roar. Incoming! Kat and I exchange glances with saucer-wide eyes. It's Vietnam! With Kat

The impact is audible – the thud of flesh meeting rock. She reappears in the pool below, gasping in agony...

immobilized. I yell the surreal scene in her ear. "There's a helicopter. A person is being winched down. They have antennas on their helmet. This could be an alien invasion, but let's hope it's a paramedic."

And voila! Paula, the only female Special Casualty Access (SCAT) paramedic in Australia appears. A Superwoman-Ninja-Princess of Power all rolled into one, a member of an elite squad. And she's carrying a backpack of drugs. Aaron joins her, and the silence is replaced with the squawk of radios, injecting of drugs and rapid-fire questions. The action is fast and furious as a stretcher is lowered, reminding me of the A-Team opening credits. "If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the A-Team." Hired.

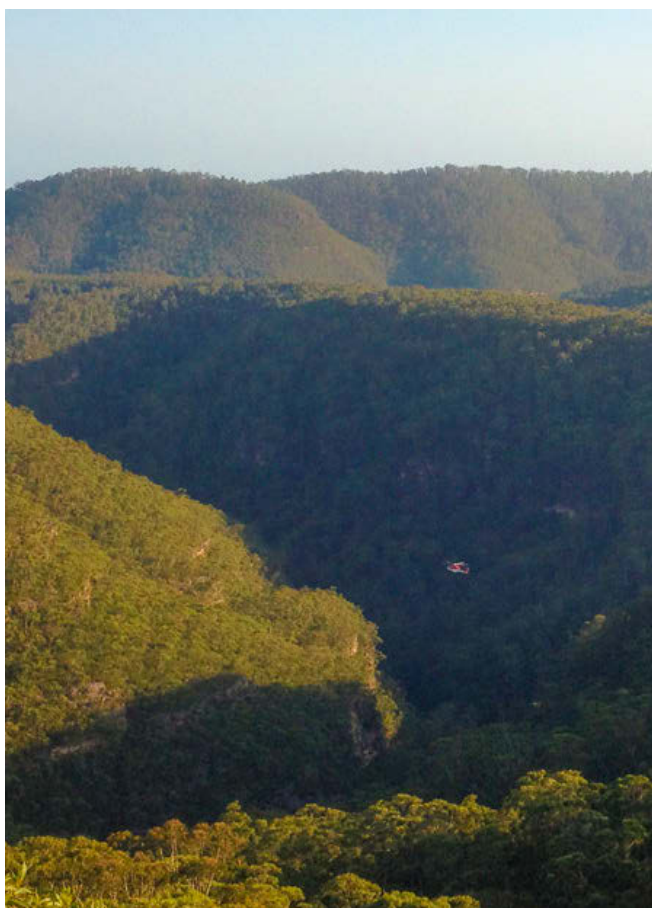
But Mother Nature is at it again – she's turning out the lights. Daylight is fading as the helicopter refuels and tries desperately again and again to move into position. Paula and Aaron work in quick choreographed partnership like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire but finally the call is made – a night winch is too dangerous. No one will be leaving tonight.

And so comes the worst moment thus far. Paula breaks the news to Kat. For the first time, she cries. Kat will spend a total of 18 hours in the ravine. Watching from afar, in the circle of Paula's headlamp, the two are frozen like Michelangelo's Pieta. There's a sense of intimacy in the tableau, and watching feels voyeuristic. Snatches of Paula's words echo in the tomblike quiet created by the helicopter's absence: "I'll be with you all night... the chopper will be back at first light, and again, I'll be with you all night."

It isn't only Paula and Aaron who'll be with us. There's nothing that lifts one's spirits like seeing four men approaching in underpants, helmets and headlamps. Aaron has fully established Hotel Canyon with roaring campfire and hot tea when the hoots and hollers herald a foot team of two paramedics and two police rescue officers swimming through the nearby icy pool. Despite the odd setting and rather loose dress code, they courteously lean down, dripping, and offer their hands. "Hi, I'm Murray. Terry. Doug. Chris."

Things are looking okay. We have glowworms. Tea. Six rescuers. A fire. Morphine. "If I wasn't in pain, this could be really fun," Kat slurs from her stretcher. A crack squad of MacGyvers has joined the A-Team. Murray saws a plastic bottle in half for two teacups. Terry quickly becomes au fait with Kat's condition.

Sitting against the wall, there's time to think. I listen to the campfire banter as the arrivals dry and



Above: Flip entertains Kat who lies perched on the flattest rock available on the rubble strewn floor of the canyon.

Left: Needles in a haystack. The helicopter dwarfed by the Blue Mountains vastness locates the stranded party thanks to Steve's coordinates.



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Access
the
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Even in a dark night,
light can be found in
the perseverance and
kindness of strangers.



Clockwise from top left: The calm before the storm - a moment of valley floor peace before events took a dangerously unexpected turn; Kat in the care of the SCAT team, enduring the cold night with constant surveillance, and a bucket load of drugs; Steve greets Kat after a harrowing extraction from the canyon, before she is swept off to Westmead Hospital.

dress fireside. Who are these people? I'm wearing six layers over and under my wetsuit. Surely they're cold – it's freezing. Aaron offers around food like a Business Class hostie. Noodles? Tea? Some nibbles? Lying to rest, something soft lands on me – a tarp. It's done gently, wordlessly. We're being held in the soft palms of hardhat angels.

Flames turn to embers. I'm vaguely cognoscente of Paula's rustling movements tending to Kat, of stretching my legs intermittently on a rock (which unfortunately is Aarons' head). Then, as the glimpse of sky above turns from inky black to pre-dawn slate, there's the unmistakable sound of the helicopter.

Camp is packed in minutes – the A-Team/MacGyver well oiled machine is awake and at work. Kat's stretcher is manoeuvred mid-canyon. The winch descends and Kat and Paula are lifted skywards. The helicopter hover is technical and risky, the stretcher dodging a falling tree before invisible hands reach out and draw them to safety.

The rest of us are winched out shortly after. Landing in Katoomba, we're stunned by the work behind the rescue. Ambulances and police cars wait. We can finally thank the helicopter crew: Hugh, Brendan, Luke, Brad and Sgt Ian Colless of Blue Mountains Police Rescue. And Steve; after phoning in the alarm he was instructed to continue hiking out and has been waiting anxiously by the helipad all night. The band is back together.

In fact, this whole experience has me in awe of my mates. Of Kat's irrepressible humour, bravery and ability to make friends even when broken on a canyon floor. Of Steve's quick reactions, warmth and the gentle way he cared for Kat post accident. Of Till's steadfast calmness. As Steve said, these experiences create bonds for life.

Is our love of the great outdoors dented? No. Is that foolish? With any undertaking, preparation, planning and experience are the keys to success. Even then, even if prepared, things go wrong.

It's human to fail, but so is bouncing back, determination not to be a spectator, but continue to be engaged, be involved, to undertake challenges, to never stop exploring. The professionalism of the rescue was inspiring. Even in a dark night, light can be found in the perseverance and kindness of strangers.

Those strangers are the supreme quiet achievers to whom all praise is due. Not just our team, but all paramedics, police members, helicopter pilots and ambulance drivers... those who don't work to a clock, have someone else tuck their kids in, break dinner plans, and then bring with them no resentment but good spirits, incredible skills and assistance.

When experience becomes irrelevant, when Mother Nature and Lady Luck run off into the distance together and you have a problem no one else can help with, you may find only the ones who can. The A-Team.

Paddling obsession

She has several world titles and world championships to her name but most people have never heard of Rosalyn Lawrence. That could change with a medal performance the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

WORDS DEAN MELLOR PHOTOS DELLY CARR



GET TO KNOW ROSALYN

Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to watch an interview with Rosalyn Lawrence.

ROSALYN LAWRENCE IS a kayaker. Has been since she was a kid. In fact, she was only two-years of age when she first went paddling and now, just 24, she already has a number of world titles and championships to her name. So how did this unassuming country girl end up becoming an elite athlete?

"My dad was really into kayaking and my sisters loved it," Rosalyn says. "We just went camping and kayaking all the time and it kind of moved from there into competitive slalom."

Rosalyn's older sisters have also had a degree of success in kayaks over the years. "Kate was world cup champion one year and Jacqui was an Olympic silver medalist in 2008. They've both retired now so I've got a great cheer squad," Rosalyn laughs.

But a life of paddling hasn't just come about because of her family heritage; Rosalyn simply loves being out on the water, enjoying the great outdoors. "I love being out on the whitewater in nature. It's different every day and exciting... you can go and paddle off big waterfalls for a thrill or go and do slalom which is very technical. There's just a huge amount of variety and I love being outdoors."

When it comes to creeking, or recreational whitewater paddling, Rosalyn says there are plenty of rivers she likes to paddle in Australia, but one of her favourites is the Leven Canyon run in Tasmania. "I've only done it once but was really good fun. It has rapids and drops and whitewater..."

"There are a lot of great runs around Cairns that I'd like to revisit," she adds. "The last chance I had to go creeking in Australia was on the Wollondilly River [in the Southern Highlands, NSW]. My mate Ben Hankinson, legend, tells me it was the highest it's ever been paddled – I don't think my heart rate has ever been so high for so long!" Rosalyn admits.

In terms of slalom, "I always liked the Nymboida Canoe Centre, Goolang Creek, but it's closed down at the moment, unfortunately." The water flow into Goolang Creek is dependent upon the hydro-electric power station that draws water out of the Nymboida River, but unfortunately the 90-year old power station is no longer functioning, so there's simply not enough water to paddle on.

"There's a petition running to try and get [the Goolang Creek water flows] open again," Rosalyn says. "Hopefully something will come out of it because it's a really important place for whitewater kayaking in Australia, and developing the sport." Rosalyn has certainly proved that over the years, being crowned national champion in slalom C1 and K1, wildwater C1 and boater cross, "but I would be hard pressed to remember which years," she admits.

Rosalyn's overseas success covers several kayaking disciplines, but one of her favourite events is the

World Extreme Championships Sickline in Oetz, Austria. "Racing at the Sickline event has definitely been a highlight. It's a really fantastic venue and the organisers do a great job of ramping up the atmosphere."

"It's a really good section of whitewater. It's technical and exciting. Normally, when you go creeking, you paddle in, take a look at a rapid and find a line, do it once and you keep going. But this section, you can see it from the bank and because it's a race you do it over and over again. For me it's kind of nearly merging a bit of slalom and extreme paddling because I have to work out my line and try and perfect it every time I go down."

"It's a really beautiful part of the world, with the Austrian lakes, beautiful places for swimming, going hiking in the mountains, kayaking, there's great rock climbing..."

As well as the competition, it's a love of nature that draws Rosalyn to different rivers around the world, such as the Landsborough River in New Zealand. "That was really good fun," Rosalyn says. "We did the Landsborough... my sister and my dad and a good friend of ours who we met through kayaking. There was stunning scenery, exciting helicoptering, we camped out by the river overnight... I try and get away to do that kind of creeking whenever I can get away from doing slalom, where I'm committed to quite a lot of training and races overseas."

Anyone competing at an elite level could find that the commitment and training required could become a chore, but this is not the case in Rosalyn's experience. "Competition is definitely never a chore, it's usually very exciting," she says. "Training, I guess it could go that way, but I usually try and mix things up by going creeking or going to the beach and paddling there... it's just such a dynamic sport that it really never gets boring. I enjoy it every day."

When it comes to slalom, Rosalyn's preferred discipline is C1, where she kneels in the boat and uses a single-blade paddle, but she's had to shift her focus to K1, where she sits in the boat and uses a double-blade paddle. "I started C1 in 2008/2009 and I really enjoy it," she says. "I feel a lot more comfortable and natural in the boat, so I would like to spend a lot more time doing C1, but it's not looking like it will be in the Olympics until 2020 in Tokyo," she says. "My immediate priority is the 2016 Olympics in Rio [where there will only be K1 for women] so I'm doing a lot of training in K1." This being the case, a lot of funding for the Olympics is based around K1, "So if I'm winning world cups and championships in C1, I can't get as much funding for that as I can in K1 to keep paddling... and I need to get as much funding as I can," Rosalyn says.



A MATTER OF EQUALITY

AS C1 IS Rosalyn's preferred kayaking discipline, she's obviously quite passionate about its omission from the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"The ICF (International Canoe Federation) kind of keeps everything under wraps, they never really let us know what's going on," Rosalyn says. "They had a congress a while ago where they announced that they would try and get C1 Women's into Tokyo in 2020. They didn't really say how they would do it, and it wasn't until an article came out from someone at the Royal Canoe Club saying that the ICF had also voted on which classes they would get rid of at Tokyo to fit C1 Women's in."

"Obviously that's not a very nice thing to do, I don't want to see any classes being gotten rid of, either in slalom or in sprint, but it's showing a little more commitment from them towards getting it [C1 Women's] in. It kind of just needs as much media attention as possible so that they know that people care."

profile

And funding for kayakers isn't easy to come by. "Some people have got no idea what kayaking is," Rosalyn says. "You know, there are just so many people who have got a boat in their garage that they pull out once a year and go for a paddle in, but not too many people know many of the details about the different disciplines or any of the politics."

"I just signed a new deal with Sydney Harbour Kayaks, one of my biggest sponsors so far, and they are obviously in the industry and I'm kind of an ambassador for them, whereas my other sponsors have been to do with providing me boats and gear and stuff like that. It's great to have a sponsor who's really happy to help me out. [Sydney Harbour Kayaks] want to get me to the Olympics, and I'm going to help promote kayaking there and hopefully take some classes."

While there's no whitewater in Sydney's Middle Harbour, where Sydney Harbour Kayaks is based, Rosalyn says she still enjoys paddling there. "I love being on the ocean," she says. "It's a bit of a different experience but it's still kayaking so it's very enjoyable. I just love the open space, something a little bit different."



"I like anything in the outdoors. About every year I'll pick up a new sport and say 'Aaagh, I'm going to do heaps of this', then I realise I need to do more training in slalom. I've done a bit of rock climbing over the years but I haven't had the chance to go outdoors all that often. Actually, the weekend just gone I went outdoor rock climbing for the first time and it was awesome."

"I usually just pick up random sports, Rosalyn says. "I did a bit of boxing for a while, I did a bit of aerial silks for a while, I just love bushwalking and getting in the outdoors, but most of the time I'm in a kayak."

RESULTS

- C1W Wildwater Sprint World Champion, Augsburg, Germany, 2011
- Sickline Extreme Kayak World Champion, Oetz, Austria, 2012
- C1W Teams World Champion with Jess Fox and Ali Borrows, Prague, Czech Republic, 2013
- C1W World Cup Champion, 2009, 2010, 2012
- U23 C1W World Champion, Wausau, USA, 2012
- U23 C1W Teams World Champion with Jess Fox and Ali Borrows, Wausau, USA,
- National Champion in Slalom C1 and K1, Wildwater C1 and Boater Cross, "but I would be hard pressed to remember which years," Rosalyn says.

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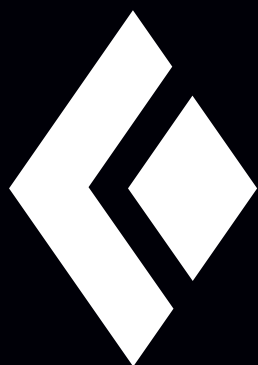
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PHOTO: Autumn colours on the Alps to Ocean cycle adventure | Colin Monteath

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A person wearing a hat and a life vest is paddling a red and orange Wenonah canoe on a calm lake. The background is a dense, green forested shoreline. The text "Tougher than you think" is overlaid in white serif font.

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KEPLER TRACK, NEW ZEALAND

A real alternative

The Kepler Track has a relative short history but this well maintained trail can rightly claim to be an iconic destination for walkers.

WORDS CHRIS ORD

SOME OF THE best multiday hiking tracks trace along ancient footpaths, routed via village-to-remote-village, connecting people and places over wild mountain ranges. Their sense of place and experience are intricately tied to the layers of human history that have coursed along them in the context of grand landscapes. The walking is often tough, the accommodation, if any, rough.

Equally, however, some of the world's best walks actually boast little heritage, being custom-built to service the demands of the growing itinerant community of recreational trekkers. And there's a growing feeling amongst that wandering multitude that, you know what, nighttime resting places need not be so rudimentary and it's kind of nice to have trails that while still natural, have been subtly massaged for better walking underfoot.

It is in this context that New Zealand's Kepler Track can rightly claim to be an iconic destination for walkers, boasting as it does a well-maintained path dotted with comfy, shared huts and travelling through the still-wild and very much majestic mountains of Fiordland National Park, on New Zealand's south island.

Where other walks in New Zealand meander along ancient Maori trading tracks or European pioneer trails, the Kepler has a relative short and mundane history. In 1985, the Fiordland National Park Board decided to celebrate the centennial

of National Parks in New Zealand by creating a new track. This was partly to celebrate the milestone and partly as a solution to the overcrowding taking place on two other popular walks, the Milford and Routeburn Tracks. Essentially, the Kepler began with park personnel looking at a map and pencilling in where potential tracks could go based on shorter walks and topographic interest. The pencil line that made it into print and eventually fleshed out on earth was a track starting and finishing at the outlet to Lake Te Anau.

Of course, there is some walking history in the bones of Kepler, with parts based on the old walking tracks up Mount Luxmore and into Shallow Bay on the edge of Lake Manapouri. It is also the region that lays claim to being the wellspring of the conservation movement in NZ with the Save The Lake campaign centred on Lake Manapouri evolving here in the 1960s.

Two years after the first whisperings of a new trail were heard in departmental boardrooms, and \$1.5 million in grants later, the 60km track, featuring many kilometres of new pathway plus upgraded bridges, boardwalks and three spacious huts, was realised. And from the moment walkers – and all too soon, runners – stepped along it, the Kepler was regarded as an instant adventure icon.

"A couple of things stand out about the Kepler," says Grant Tremain, Conservation Services Manager overseeing recreation and historic

Right: Luxmore Hut looks out over Lake Te Anau and the Southern Alps.

Below: The track standard is quite high, due to the Kepler being one of the "youngest" of the New Zealand Great Walks.

Essentially, the Kepler began with park personnel looking at a map and pencilling in where potential tracks could go...

facilities in Fiordland.

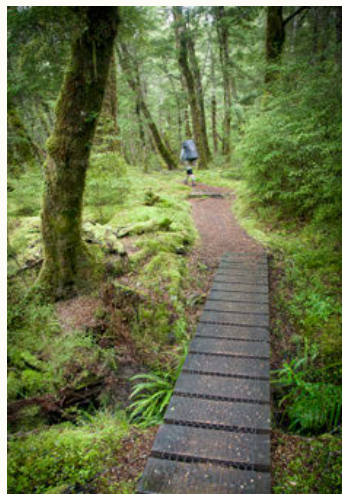
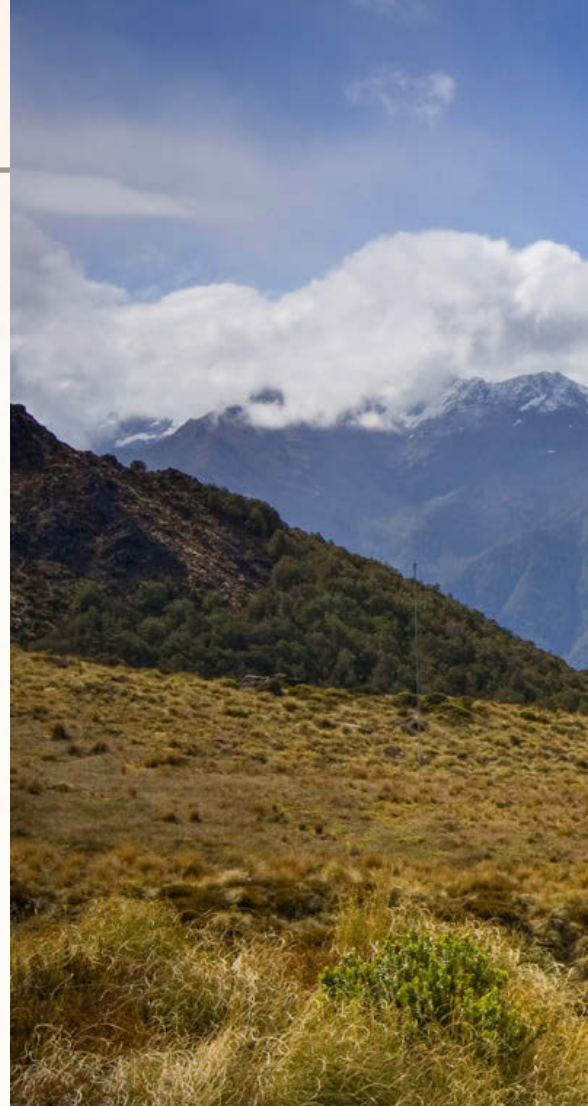
A Te Anau local, Grant has worked on the track and its huts for more than 10 years.

"Being the most eastern of the Great Walks in Fiordland, the Kepler is quite different in feel to the others. Firstly, the length of time on the top between the Luxmore and Iris Burn huts is one of the longest alpine sections of any New Zealand Great Walk.

"Secondly, because it is a relatively new track, more modern construction techniques have been used, meaning the gradient and standard are much more user-friendly, even though there are some long climbs and exposed sections."

"The views over Murchison Mountains, where the Takahe (an endangered flightless bird indigenous to New Zealand) were rediscovered are particularly impressive, as well as the section around Lake Manapouri," says Grant.

"Being the first purpose-built multiday tramping track in New Zealand, it was able to be designed





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to suit its purpose as a circuit [making logistics easier] and its location close to Te Anau gives a great diversity on the more accessible parts – runners, picnickers, boaties and fisherman are regular users alongside trampers,” says Grant.

The mention of runner may raise eyebrows, however since the track’s inception, running, as much as walking, has been entwined in its unfolding history. Indeed, Grant himself spends plenty of time running on Kepler “training for a local event, the Luxmore Grunt.”

At 27km out and back to Luxmore Hut, the Luxmore Grunt is but the baby brother to the Kepler Challenge, which takes in the entire circuit. And while walkers finish the loop in three to four days, Challenge runners smash over the total ascent of 1350m, topping out at a highest elevation of 1400m, in little more than four and a half hours. The current record held by Martin Dent stands at four hours 33 minutes and 37 seconds.

The genesis of that astonishing record was in a teacher’s staff room

at nearby Fiordland College, where three running-addicted colleagues set about a plan to run the Milford Track in celebration of its centenary. Quickly realising that the logistics of running an event on the end-to-end Milford were prohibitive, they cast eyes to the not quite finished Kepler. A mountain challenge was then born when, in 1988, 150 competitors lined up to tackle the fresh track that was barely trodden on in parts. Conservation Ranger at the time, Ken Bradley, described it as “aligned but not formed – the surface was rough and uneven and basically runners would be jumping over tussocks and choosing their own paths.”

This was adventure running in its early days, and free forming the route – indeed helping add early layers to its foundation – was considered just fine by these hardy men and women. Even back then, the time taken by Russell Prince to win the inaugural event was impressive: five hours 17 minutes 34 seconds. Today, the race sells out in 10 minutes and hosts 450 runners.

Of course, for most who venture along the Kepler, the idea of running it would be anathema, or at least viewed as ‘a bit of a rush’. Most walkers take the more genteel option of covering the 60km in up to four days, taking advantage of the excellent network of three huts: Luxmore, Iris Burn and Moturau. For many, the communal and social nature of staying in the huts is as much a highlight as the more introspective moments enjoyed walking, with travellers huddling around tables, discussing the finest view of the day while savoring a hot, re-energising meal.

“The huts can be busy, but they are pretty user friendly,” says Grant, who notes that while the huts are excellent refuges for weary trampers, they remain long shots in any architectural award stakes.

“Luxmore Hut was once called the ugliest hut in New Zealand, but we have worked at improving this, extending the kitchen area and improving the insulation, making it much warmer and user friendly.

RESOURCES

Track details:

www.greatwalks.co.nz/kepler-track
www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/fiordland/eastern-fiordland/kepler-track/

Walking it:

Prior booking is required for the use of huts and campsites between late October and late April (summer season). Bookings can be made online at www.doc.govt.nz/ or at the Te Anau Department of Conservation office.

Booking it:

Great Walks Bookings, Department of Conservation, Te Anau
Phone: +64 3 249 8514 Email: greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz
Website: www.doc.govt.nz/

Running it:

www.keplerchallenge.co.nz

"All three huts are in great locations, with plenty to do for people who still have energy on arrival. There are caves at Luxmore, the waterfall at Iris Burn hut, as well as a swimming hole in the river. Moturau, located on the edge of Lake Manapouri, is also a good place for a dip, or just a lounge around on the beach.

"The bunkrooms can be busy, but it adds to the general atmosphere. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic hut staff are also able to interact with visitors, giving people a better feel for the areas around the huts."

While a cuppa and conversation around tables appeals, it remains the grandeur of nature that places the Kepler up there with the most memorable wilderness experiences.

Grant nominates the Iris Burn valley section as "one of the nicest valley walks in the country."



Having worked on the Kepler for more than a decade, there are a few other memories he has stored away, representative of the kind visitors can also come away with.

"Walking across the ridge tops in a foot of snow with my parents (in the '60s) is a favourite," says Grant. "Camping over winter in the hut working on the kitchen extensions,

being woken by Kiwi calls at Iris Burn hut, watching red deer feeding in front of the hut, working with a range of staff all over the sections of the track, having blue ducks swimming around me when crossing the river..."

And like anyone who has experienced the Kepler Track, Grant, of course, could go on.

The Kepler Track can be walked in either direction. Here, walkers tackle the steady – and long – climb up to Luxmore Hut, on the track's eastern side.

GETTING THERE

The Kepler Track is located in Fiordland National Park, in the south of New Zealand's South Island, near Te Anau and Lake Manapouri.

Access to the track is usually at the Control Gates, located 4.6km from the nearest township of Te Anau.

Access by road is usually from either Invercargill (158km) or Queenstown (197km), both of which have airports with connections to Auckland. Queenstown has limited direct international flights.

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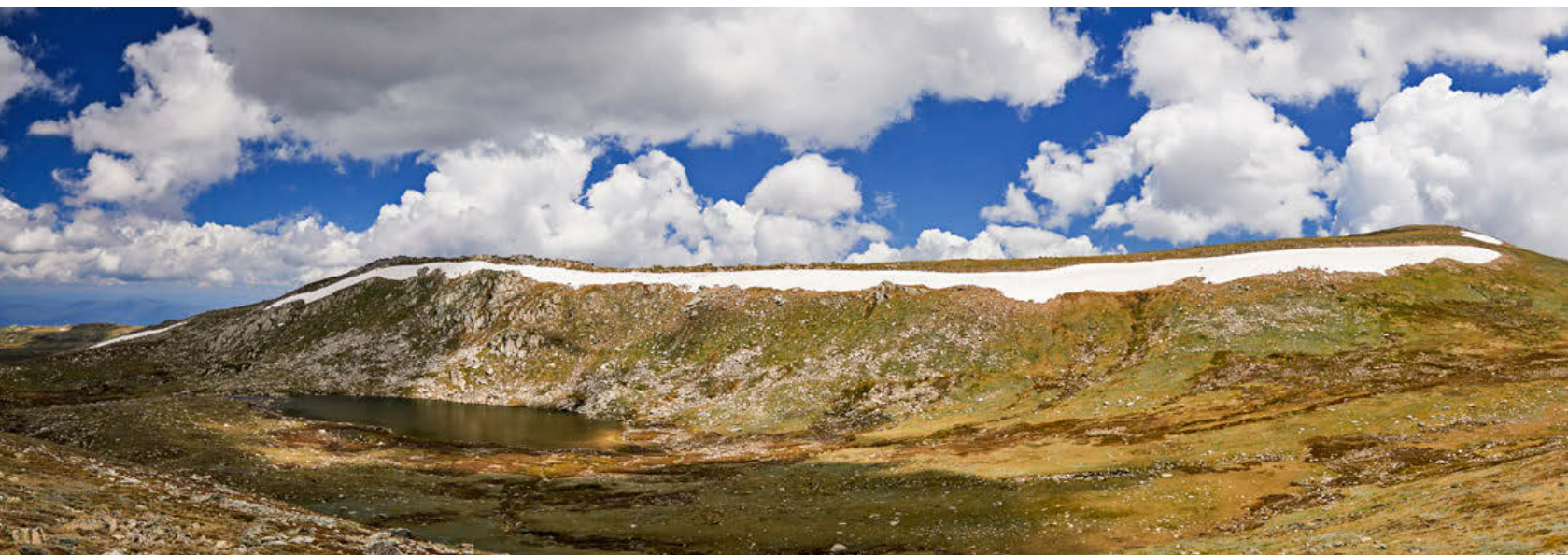


A NEW GENERATION

One in ten Aussies have made the ascent to the top of our tallest mountain, and a quite staggering seven out of ten of us want make the climb up Mt Kosciuszko, AG Outdoor sends its rookie father-and-son team of Tim and Max Robson to tackle the Kosciuszko Track.

WORDS **TIM ROBSON** PHOTOS **MARK WATSON**



**ALPINE HIGH**

Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to watch a video of all Thredbo has to offer.

I OFTEN WONDER if I took up cycling at the age of five just to avoid any notion of walking anywhere. Once I'd discovered the joys of covering terrain on two wheels, anything else seemed... well, slow. Walks on the beach, bushwalks, even a post-dinner stroll around the block; none have never really appealed to me, and as a consequence, I've become quite adroit at avoiding them.

My 12-year-old son, Max, has also inherited a love of two wheels and a healthy disdain for bipedal motion. If he can ride, he'll ride. Of course, most young 'uns still need to walk in the course of their daily lives – Max walks about two kilometres a day between school bus stops – but I've managed to exorcise almost every notion of a walk, save for the occasional stroll on a beach.

Lately, though, my wife has taken to two feet, walking up to ten kilometres at a time with the family mutt a couple of times a week – and because I'm the old grump of the family who's always detested walking, more often than not I'm not asked along. And lately I've wondered if it's not such a silly idea to get out from behind my desk a little more and indulge in something that doesn't require a helmet, gloves and lycra shorts.

The invitation to tackle the Kosciuszko Track fell right in the midst of this rumination – though, to confess, my first thought was “great! We can ride bikes there after!” While I haven't visited Thredbo for some years, I've reported on mountain bike races there on and off for about 20 years, even competing occasionally. Max, too, is keen to progress his mountain biking path to the downhill discipline, and Thredbo's Cannonball Run is renowned as being one of the most challenging in the country.

The more I thought about it, though, the more the thought of ascending Australia's highest peak appealed. Honestly, I've never considered the possibility of climbing the tallest

anything, and to tick that box may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The thought, though, is tempered by a fear of the unknown; would I be able to make the distance? What will I need to take? Do I need special climbing gear?

After chatting to a few people, my concerns abate somewhat; everyone says that the walk is an easy one, with no need for specialised equipment outside of a set of sensible outdoors apparel. “I have high school groups come up all the time,” says our guide, Alexis Carrington. “Getting them to take their headphones off for a few minutes is another question, though!”

The forecast for our December walk looks promising as we pack for the weekend; temperatures in the mid-teens with light winds and mostly clear skies. As anyone who has spent a few days down there can attest, though, the weather cannot – and must not – be trusted. There have been many summer mornings where I've awoken in Thredbo village to low single-digit temps, howling winds and almost zero visibility. We throw in a few layers of clothes, along with beanies, gloves and our cycling Camelbaks, and hope the weather bureau's predictions hold up.

One of the obstacles for the Alpine region is the perceived time it takes to get down to the region. From our base in Wollongong, the trip is surprisingly short, at a nick over 5.5 hours including stops. The roads into the area are in remarkable condition, and rest areas are in plentiful supply, too. We've been put up in the Thredbo Alpine Hotel, the only hotel within Thredbo village. This grand old lady is definitely ready for a makeover, but its facilities are excellent, its staff incredibly friendly and the rooms more than adequate for adventure travellers. The Cascades restaurant breakfast, in particular, pleases Max no end; he makes the awesome staff work overtime to keep him in hash browns and bacon. Oh, to be 12 again...

We're due to meet Alexis at 0930, and we're just about out the door when I realise I'd left my only pair of walking

Clockwise from top right: High in the sky on two wheels; riding down – fast; Alexis points out some of the unique alpine vegetation on the way up to the top of Mt Kosciuszko; the truly high country near the summit. Spectacular!



shoes – in truth, nothing more than a good-quality pair of trail-runners – back in Wollongong. I'm intensely annoyed with myself. Our photog Mark, though, reckons my Vans sneakers will suffice. "It's really not that hard a walk," says the guy who hiked eight hours into the Alpine backcountry and overnighted in the Ranges this past winter to take just one incredible shot (you can see Mark's shot in the last issue). I've got no choice but to believe him. We decide on shorts and jackets for the sunny, breezy day, stashing gloves and beanies in our Camelbaks for a little insurance.

To access the start of the walk, it's a 12-minute ride up the Kosciuszko Express quad-chair. With a capacity of up to 800 people, the Express whisks us quickly over the mountain. Mountain bike trails criss-cross the snow-free runs beneath us, with riders whooping and cheering as they negotiate the jumps and turns. "I thought we would be a lot higher up than this," remarks Max, who admitted to a case of the nerves before we hopped on board the chair. "This is actually pretty cool." At the top of the chair sits the famed Eagles Nest restaurant, which is the last place we'll be able to stock up on drinking water before we hit the trail. With pockets stuffed with muesli bars, two litres of water and a stash of lollies, it's time to stride out.

The track in its current form has been in place for nearly 30 years and, at 14km long there and back, it's a pretty solid day out. I'm still a little worried that cycling fitness won't translate to hiking fitness, and while it's not debilitating, you can definitely feel the altitude. Max, though, is captivated straight away with the amazing vista before us. "Honestly? I expected to be trekking through a jungle!" he exclaims. "This is awesome!" We strike out along the paved path, with Alexis stopping from time to time to explain some of the park's amazing flora. From peppermint bushes to snow daisies, her knowledge is astounding; even Max is captivated.

Our first break is at the lookout that gives us a breathtaking

We strike out along the paved path, with Alexis stopping from time to time to explain some of the park's amazing flora.





We've had a few great adventures over the years, but this one is a little more special, and a little bit poignant for me. . . It's a very good moment.



Above: Crossing the Thredbo River on the MTB trail of the same name.

Left: Father and son soak up the sights and atmosphere on the top of Australia.

view of the Rams Head range. The day is made for walking, and there is visibility for days. It's hard to gauge just how vast the rooftop of Australia is until you see it in person, and my iPhone pics don't do it justice.

The paved path gives way to a wide, raised metal walkway that lifts us above the delicate ecosystem below. Stained a dark brown by its exposure to the elements, the track isn't a scar on the beautiful surrounds; rather, it appears to be a part of it, as it meanders to follow the terrain, rather than slash straight through it.

Lake Cootapatamba is the next stop on our path, overhung by a large snow patch that will feed the lake for the next few weeks. We're about six kilometres in, and I'm starting to notice my legs a little. My enforced footwear choice has been more than okay, but trail shoes or running sneakers would have been a lot better. That'll teach me! Max is enjoying himself immensely, and I'm struck by the fact that it's my influence that may have kept him from enjoying something like this. It's a sobering thought.

We push on past the highest toilet block in the country at Rawson Pass. The trail gives over to graded gravel here as it winds its way around to the top of Australia. Alexis points out the still-visible scarring to the terrain where, almost 30 years ago, people could drive to within 400m of the summit and straight-line it up the slope to the summit. "That seems like cheating," Max observes, and I agree wholeheartedly. The road is not steep, but the more experienced Alexis and Mark push away from Max and I on the last ascent, leaving us to enjoy the walk together as father and son. Only a few short months away from his teen years, he's on the verge of going his own way in life. We've had a few great adventures

over the years, but this one is a little bit more special, and a little bit poignant for me. We chat a little, enjoying each other's company away from the pressures of work, school, family and friends. It's a very good moment.

We round the last bend and, almost from nowhere, we've crested the summit, and are standing on top of Mount Kosciuszko. A few other tourists are already there, but the unfenced, unfettered area is big enough for all to enjoy. A young couple have set up a picnic just a few metres down the front face, while a solo Dutch hiker asks us to take a photo of her atop the monolith that marks the spot. Not only does it turn out that Alexis has friends in the Netherlands, but that I'm of Dutch stock, as well. It's a small world...

A quick lunch break is in order, as our photography has taken a little more time out of the day than we'd planned. With the lifts stopping at 4.30pm, we needed to hustle a little to make it back. As they say in the classics, it's all downhill from here, and the walk back is much easier. Max and I chat all the way back, and I learn with some astonishment just how knowledgeable he is on a number of topics. I let him do most of the talking; my calves were starting to protest mightily, while my citified habit of an 11am caffeine hit had gone unanswered, leaving me with a dull ache behind the eyes. Note to self – take choc-coated coffee beans on the next trip.

We are tired but smiling by the time we hit the Eagles Nest restaurant for a coffee and beer break. Alexis has presented us with certificates commemorating our achievement; sure, it's not like we've crested K2, but we have climbed the highest peak in our beautiful country, and that's a pretty damn good feeling for this new walker.

We spend the next day indulging our cycling passions under

OUR WALKING GUIDE



Name:

Alexis Carrington

Age: 32

From: Fernie, British Columbia

Years at Thredbo: 2

Tip: "Check the weather! Make sure you've got at least two litres of water, sunscreen and a bit of food to help you along the way."



By climbing to the top of Mt Kosciuszko, Max and I have achieved something that we know other families will get the same joy from.



Max carves up Thredbo's challenging trails with ease.

OUR RIDING GUIDE



Name:

Tim Windshuttle

Age: 24

From: Newport, NSW

Years at Thredbo: 8

Tip: "Mid-week prices in the off-season are way cheaper than weekend rates. And you can hire everything you need through us, including helmets, body armour and gloves."

the experienced eye of Tim Windshuttle, a young but vastly experienced bike guide who helps to run Thredbo's busy bike rental business. We hit the Thredbo Valley Trail on our own machines, wending our way over 14km of wide gravel track that follows the Snowy River down to Lake Crackenback. With plans to extend the trail as far as Jindabyne, it's a fantastic way to immerse yourself in the riverside vista that makes up so much of this part of the park.

After a brief stop for new gear and lunch — having a hotel room 100m from the base of the chairlift pays dividends here — it's time to explore the gravity side of mountain biking. The Flow Trail is designed to offer the thrills of a downhill descent without the heart-stopping drops and insane speeds that would scare off the average rider. Again, I find myself absolutely astounded at just how capable and talented my son is on a bike. Clearing every double jump and negotiating the tougher 'A-line' sections on his very first try, I feel amazingly privileged to see it first-hand.

There's enough time at the end of the day to try our hand at the Cannonball Run aboard Thredbo's downhill-specific Giant Glory hire bikes. With 200mm of suspension travel front and rear, massive, grippy tyres and huge brakes, the bikes are built to take on the white-knuckle, black-diamond Cannonball trail. Rock-strewn drops are punctuated with huge jumps, tight switchback turns and high-speed sections where you'll touch 70km/h — if you dare. It's exhausting and exhilarating, and thoroughly addictive.

Our two-day odyssey ends on the balcony of the Thredbo Pub, sharing beers and lemonade with the guides and staff who, in just 48 hours, have become more than just resort

staff to us. I'm also incredibly fortunate to be able to see my son easily mix it with the adults, morphing before my eyes into a young man.

By climbing to the top of Mt Kosciuszko, Max and I have achieved something that we know other families will get the same joy from. For the rewards at the end, the walk to the top of Australia is well worth the effort. We're already talking about when we're going to tackle it again, this time with my wife and youngest daughter in tow.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: It's a 500km drive from Sydney or 600km from Melbourne. You'll need a park pass for your vehicle when you arrive at Kosciuszko National Park, or pick one up from the information centre in Thredbo. During summer, you can fly to Canberra Airport and transfer; or there's a range of coach services available from Canberra or Sydney.

When to go: The chairlift at Thredbo is open year-round, so any time you can get there you'll find something fun to do.

Summer activities run between October and May.

Other activities: Aside from walking, mountain biking and fishing, you can also enjoy golf, tennis and abseiling. There's also the leisure centre, which has a sports hall, swimming pool, squash courts and bouldering wall. And don't forget the bobsled!

More info: All the details for transport, accommodation, activities and conditions can be found at www.thredbo.com.au

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ADVENTURE | HAIDA GWAI, CANADA

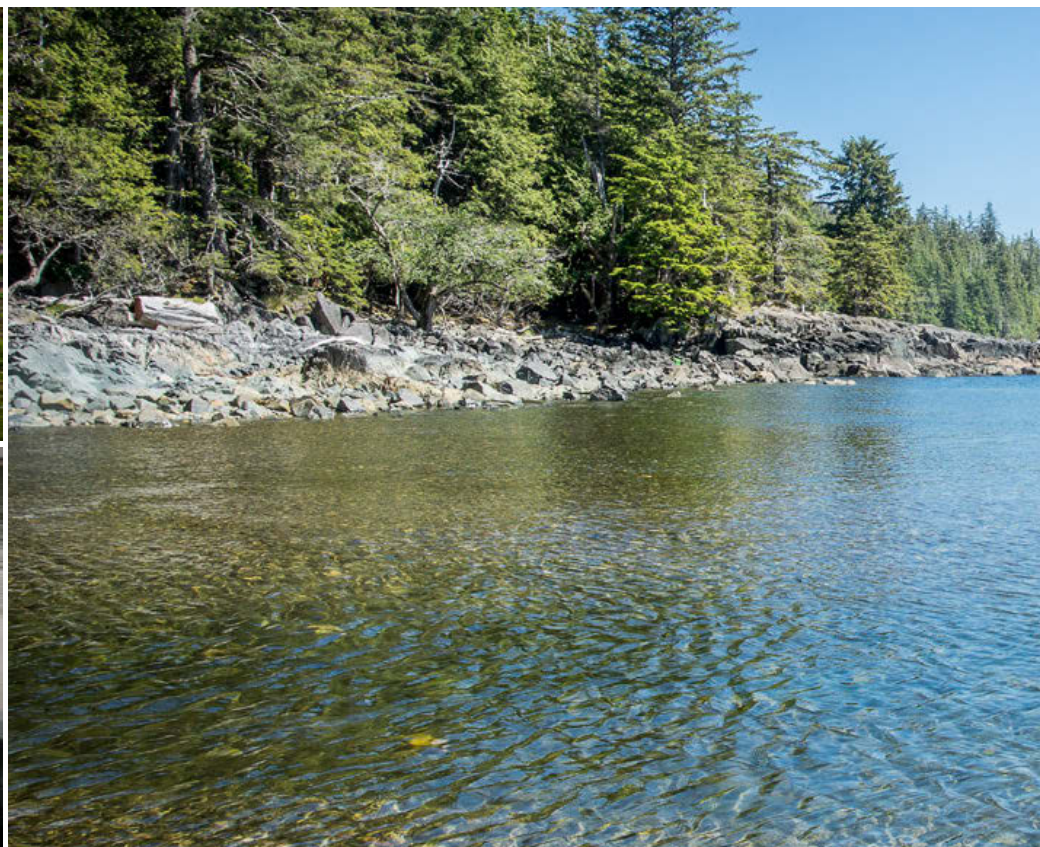
ANOTHER WORLD

When the only sound you hear
is the dip of your paddle in
the ocean and the exhalation
of a whale's breath, you know
you're somewhere special.

WORDS AND PHOTOS JUSTIN WALKER







SITTING IN A sea kayak measuring around five metres in length, and knowing one of the world's largest mammals — a humpback whale — was fishing nearby, with little concern or regard for the nearby kayakers, should have imbued me with an sense of fragility. It didn't. Instead, it was a sense of having become a very small part of this marine giant's world, Haida Gwaii, an archipelago (also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands) off British Columbia's northern coast that is saturated in wildlife, a unique rugged beauty, and First Nations culture and history.

NATURAL WONDERLAND

Haida Gwaii comprises more than 200 mostly uninhabited islands of various sizes, around 100km off the northern British Columbia coast, and it cops the brunt of the powerful Pacific Ocean's tumultuous weather and tides. Inhabiting the islands and surrounding waters is a plethora of wildlife — whales, dolphins and myriad fish species, including the ubiquitous salmon. Onshore you will find a huge number of seabird colonies, bald eagles and other raptors, and, yep, bears. In fact, the biggest black bears recorded reside here.

There are a number of theories as to why the island bears are so big, including the fact there are no competitors (read: no grizzly bears). Another

suggests because the islands don't cop a "real winter", the bears do not hibernate, thus don't lose weight over winter. And there's ample food — most of their diet is intertidal creatures. The result of this is a bear with jaws that have evolved to be larger due to having to feed on hard-shelled food.

The islands are contained within the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site. They are also the homeland of the Haida (First Nations) people and contain a number of historical sites, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of SGang Gwaay Llnagaay (Ninstints) that was part of our Southern Gwaii Haanas Explorer trip. Add in the fact the islands are also known as Canada's Galapagos, owing to their isolation from the mainland and the resultant unique land mammals and plants, and it's easy to see why a trip here has been at the top of my paddling bucket list.

AN UNEXPECTED HISTORY LESSON

I never envisaged starting a sea kayak expedition drifting, engine broken, in a Zodiac in howling wind and rain. For me, and the rest of the Kingfisher Wilderness Adventures kayaking group tackling the company's Southern Gwaii Haanas Explorer eight-day tour, it was something that just never crossed our minds. Even though the

situation could have been perceived as dire, we were all calm while waiting for our Zodiac pilot, Grace, to return with a new engine. She had earlier picked us up from Sandspit for the trip down to Kat Island camp. The upside for our group — a mix of Canadians (Gary, Sue and Anne, plus one of our two guides Silke), South Africans (Andy and Corinna) and one Australian (that'd be me) — was a visit to nearby Tanu Island and the Haida Watchmen's hut as we awaited Grace's return.

T'aanuu Llnagaay (Tanu) is one of Haida Gwaii's main historical sites, containing the remains of a Haida village. Originally the village comprised more than 25 long houses, but now there are only some posts, beams and rectangular pits to remind us of what had stood long before. The two Haida on Watchmen duty, Mary and Walter, were gracious enough to provide us with an impromptu tour of the village site on our way to their hut. On top of

Mary and Walter were gracious enough to provide an impromptu tour of the village site...

Clockwise from below: A humpback whale shows off for the group; the first camp at Kat Island; Anne gets ready to exit the kayak at Raspberry Cove; our wet and wild beginning; a healthy – and large – black bear.



EXPERIENCE
HAIDA GWAII
Use the free **viewa**
app to scan this page
to watch a video.



that, they fed and entertained us for the couple of hours it took for Grace to return. They were more than happy to explain some of their duties as Watchmen, and to recount stories of when they were growing up in the region. It was a brilliant diversion from our original planned route. It was hard to leave their warm hut – and the awesome hospitality – after Grace returned.

THE FIRST OF THE EXTRAORDINARY

Returning to the Zodiac we were met with more inclement weather and choppier seas, and we bounced our way south to Kat Island and our first camp. It was wet and cold but great fun, and before we knew it Kat Island camp appeared through the misty rain. As soon as we landed, and met Beth Anne, our second guide, we set about unpacking the numerous boxes of food and supplies for our eight days on the water. It seemed there was a truckload of “stuff” but both our guides assured us it’d all fit in. Waiting for us were our kayaks (a mix of singles and doubles; Gary and Sue had brought their own custom Kevlar jobbie, of which we were all jealous) and a well-sheltered kitchen area. It had been an exhilarating day; my Therm-a-Rest had never felt so comfortable as when I went to bed that night. It was still raining outside my tent, but in this remote campsite I felt a world away

from the everyday – a feeling that would grow on a daily basis...

A TASTE OF NATURE'S RICHES

It took no more than five minutes. After a morning of packing food and gear into kayaks (yes, all that “stuff” did indeed fit) we hit the water at around 11am, only to stop the said five minutes later when we spotted a black bear fossicking on the far shore of the bay. The clarity of air here made it difficult to judge how far away it was but Anne and I, long zoom lenses at the ready, paddled slowly towards it. We sat their firing away on our cameras for a good 10 minutes before the bear bothered to notice us and move back up into the forest. Its seeming disregard for our presence would become a theme of our wildlife encounters on the trip; I don’t know if I was dreaming it, but there are so few human visitors to the area that local wildlife seem to ignore bipedal visitors.

We spotted plenty of salmon as we paddled through the Burnaby Narrows later that morning; Gary was champing at the bit to throw in a line (he and Sue had brought fishing gear) but had to wait until we cleared the Narrows (fishing is not permitted there) before he could chance his luck. As it turned out, patience was a virtue. Gary only had his line in for about 10 minutes before

snaring his first salmon – a huge (at least 6kg, I reckon) one that was actually too big to get into the kayak, so he let it go. It was amazing – that fish could have been a meal for all of us for the second night – but it was still nice to see it swim off to continue its migratory journey up one of the islands’ many salmon streams. Gary’s virtuous release was repaid later that same evening: as we rounded the bottom of Burnaby Island and turned north to our Swan Bay campsite, he snared a rock cod.

There’s nothing quite like relaxing after a day’s paddling and enjoying fresh fish cooked over a campfire that sits right on a beach, looking out over the sea. I was only two days in and Haida Gwaii had already become my new definition of “paddler’s heaven”.

A LONG WAY AWAY

I have visited British Columbia on a number of occasions and love the place, but am always braced for its often volatile weather, even in summer. So I was more than stoked to experience two days of sublime, sunny conditions as we continued our journey south. After leaving Swan Bay and crossing the glassy, flat waters of Skincuttle Inlet, we cut through a gap in the Bolkus Islands before rounding Deluge Point and moving into more open

water past nearby Ikeda Point on the eastern side of the island group. The paddling was brilliant with a steady pace only interrupted when we were mock-dived by a bald eagle. We'd seen the adult and juvenile eagles on a rocky outcrop just inland from the point and were guessing the adult was either showing the juvenile how to fish or was, just like the bear, not bothered about us being there — until our kayaks got in the way. Either way, it was a spectacular sight as the eagle flew in, tucked in its wings and bombed the water right in front of Gary and Sue's kayak.

We had a jarring reality check not long after watching the eagles; we'd gotten quite used to being the only people in the islands when we spotted, far in the distance, another group of kayakers. They seemed pretty intent on getting wherever they were going quickly though — we waved but they just ignored us — and Silke and Beth Anne mentioned they might actually beat us to our planned campsite of Iron Point, which would mean, for us, more paddling around to the southern side of Carpenter Bay where our guides had camped before. At 18.5 nautical miles it was to be our longest paddle, but it was great. The varying conditions, from flat water to more exposed and windy on the eastern side of the

islands, made for the perfect paddling challenge, which would be topped the following day as we continued south to (hopefully) our main goal of SGang Gwaay.

IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

As we paddled further into the southern section of the islands I thought just how easy it would be to lose oneself in Haida Gwaii. And I wasn't even having a problem with the concept of sharing this watery utopia — mainly due to the fact that those I would be sharing with were, er, considerably larger or, in the case of the wind and tides, insurmountable.

It was day four and five that really emphasised just how strong nature's rule is here. Over the course of these two days we'd moved a fair distance south, following, firstly, the Moresby Island coastline with its distant views of the mountains of Kunghit Island at our bows. Just off Point Langford, near the Langford Shoals, we'd rafted up to watch four humpbacks feed, around 100 to 150 metres away. It was mesmerising; we stayed there for over an hour as these marine leviathans worked their way around the bay chasing food. From here we moved on to our Raspberry Cove campsite, on Moresby's southeast coast, while

being shadowed by a pair of sea lions and further distracted as we watched two bald eagles fishing.

Raspberry Cove itself was surreal. Our campsite was in a sea of green moss and huge trees, just back from the beach, while offshore, the giants of the sea continued to feed and frolic. This enhanced reality continued the next morning when we left early to attempt the Houston Stewart Channel crossing to reach SGang Gwaay. Our early start got blown out of the water, literally, by the sight of a humpback fishing off Cape Fanny, quite close to our kayaks. It was more than an hour later before Silke cajoled us into leaving the whale. The old adage that time and tide wait for no man proved true; Silke had gone ahead to check the crossing and soon returned with the disappointing news that it was just too rough to attempt. Looking out over the channel we could easily spot the

We'd rafted up to watch four humpbacks feed, around 100 metres away. It was mesmerising...



Bottom of page, left to right: a bald eagle takes home some dinner; Gary and Andy try their luck with a crab trap; the golden morning light as we leave SGang Gwaay; the poles at SGang Gwaay are amazing.

whitecaps growing larger and more numerous, and knew that any crossing attempt at this point would be far too taxing — and too dangerous.

The disappointment was soon forgotten, however, when we landed at Fanny Bay for camp. We were all so intent on going through the correct landing and unloading procedure that it took us at least a minute to notice the huge black bear watching us from the top of the beach. It was very big and looked very well fed with a shiny black coat of fur, but like every other native resident of these islands, the bear was not in the least concerned with us kayakers who were suddenly doing our best still-as-a-statue impressions. The bear soon ambled away up the beach and disappeared into the forest. Another group of kayakers was camped on the western side of the beach and one of them told us the bear had been up and down the beach a few times, eating seaweed and shellfish. All I could think was, “I hope he is full.” But even with the large island bear theory confirmed, I still thought I could live here... as long as I had a solid hut with a very strong front door.

A NEVER FORGOTTEN WORLD

Our second attempt at heading south to SGang Gwaay was more successful. We left early and

were soon welcomed by (what we presumed was) the humpback from yesterday, still fishing off Fanny Point. We were at Louscoome Point soon after, and geared up for our southwest crossing of the Houston Stewart Channel, watching the conditions earnestly. It was still flat, with only a bit of wind blowing up from the south resulting in minimal chop. I was seriously pumped; I had been focused on reaching — and exploring — SGang Gwaay since I had been confirmed on the trip and it was now oh, so close. But I knew that reaching the World Heritage site was not always possible, due to the difficulty of the crossing. When Silke and Beth Anne gave the okay, I shot off at some speed, only to be calmly called back by Silke to paddle with the rest of the group. By sticking close together, we had the best chance of minimising the stalling effects of the winds, and thus the best chance of actually making it to the island.

It was only when, an hour later, we reached the sheltered bay that I relaxed. We'd made it, but it had been tough. The winds and sea had both risen dramatically in that hour, so much so that even the sight of a humpback mother and calf had not been enough to stop us.

SGang Gwaay (or Ninintints as it is also known) was the last village in the south of Haida Gwaii

to be occupied; the Haida moved north to villages on Graham Island. The island contains a number of memorial and mortuary poles, all of which are carved with the crest of the deceased. There is also a Watchmen's hut here and, as a rule, people are not permitted to camp here.

Once we'd landed and secured our kayaks, we made our way through some incredibly lush forest to the Watchmen's hut, where James William and some Haida teenagers, who were getting their first experience of the Watchmen program, greeted us. James has spent 10 (non-consecutive) years looking after the island and the historical village each season, and was a fount of knowledge on the history of the site as he showed us around. Listening to his explanation of the poles — how they were constructed and how the funeral box containing the remains would sit atop the carved pole — and how the now ruined long houses would have been constructed, was enthralling and provided a great insight to the Haida way of life before the devastation of first contact with Europeans. The arrival of Europeans and diseases such as smallpox decimated the First Nations population and, as the numbers dwindled, so did the settlements. SGang Gwaay was the last village to be deserted — in 1880 — but, thanks to the





dedication of the Haida of today, visitors can still get a sense of what life was like many hundreds of years before Europeans arrived.

A FINAL SURPRISE

Our visit to SCang Gwaay had taken a wee bit longer than we thought (we also did a short exploratory hike to a Haida habitation cave) and in that time, the winds and sea had risen dramatically. After our tour, we were all girding ourselves for the return paddle to Fanny Bay, and then the next day's paddle to Raspberry Cove for our Zodiac pickup. Even thinking about the end of our adventure was enough to put a dampener on the day. Until, that is, Beth Anne told us we'd been given the rare privilege of permission to camp on the island, rather than risk the return crossing. Being able to actually reach the island had been a great achievement; being allowed to camp here was the new highlight.

I wrote in my notebook the next morning: "I have just had the best night's sleep outdoors in my life." I don't know whether it was the spiritual ambience of the island itself, or that combined with exhaustion after a pretty big previous day. Either way, it was hard to leave SCang Gwaay behind and point our kayaks towards "home" which, in our case, would be Raspberry Cove. It was another long-ish day but it did not seem at

all tiring. Interspersed with the sites and wonders of more whales feeding was another view of our friend, the rather large black bear. It was up on a high cliff, planted on his haunches just looking out to sea when we spotted it.

Later that day we detoured to Rose Harbour, across the other side of the bay from Raspberry Cove campsite, to meet up with an eccentric German gentleman who ran a B&B there, out of the old whaling station. The station itself was interesting, but even more so were the remains of a Haida canoe in the forest about a 10-minute walk from his abode. The canoe had been nearly completed before being abandoned and left for the forest to reclaim. Its moss-covered shape proved that no matter how much humanity alters the land during its tenure, nature always wins in the end.

THE RETURN

The last day of any adventure is usually pretty chilled and ours at Raspberry Cove was no exception. Sleeping in was a luxury, as was the copious amount of coffee brewed up by Beth Anne and Silke. I also did, for the very last time, the big walk/scramble over rocks and across creeks to our *au naturel* tidal outhouse, only to find out that there was actually a "proper" outhouse at this beach, only five minutes from our tents. Apparently Silke and Beth Anne had forgotten...

The return Zodiac trip was fast, but not too fast for me not to flick back over the myriad highlights of my eight days in Haida Gwaii. Every day offered more, cementing this expedition as one of my most memorable. Whether it was watching the whales feed near our kayaks, or laughing at the bald eagle's mock-dive, each day contained a unique highlight. The most vivid memory, however, was the day and night at SCang Gwaay. Watching whales feed near us as we paddled across to a magical, culturally infused island, and then being allowed to camp there, will forever stay with me when I think of Haida Gwaii.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Air Canada flies direct from Sydney to Vancouver. And from Vancouver. See www.aircanada.com


The adventure: Kingfisher Wilderness Adventures runs a number of sea kayaking trips in Haida Gwaii (and other parts of BC), ranging in length from four to 15 days. For dates, prices and more info, see www.kingfisher-adventures.ca

AG Outdoor was a guest of Destination British Columbia (au.britishcolumbia.travel) and the Canadian Tourism Commission (au-keepexploring.canada.travel) For all things Canada, see www.canada.travel



ADVENTURE | COLORADO RIVER, USA





WORDS AND PHOTOS **MATTHEW NEWTON**

high-flow fun

Fancy a ride on one of the world's great river trips through the spectacular Grand Canyon? It will be more than the view that leaves you breathless.

THE QUESTION SEEMED absurd: “What do you all do you if a condor lands in your campsite?”

Even more absurd was the idea that we were actually expected to know the answer. As private permit holders for a 21-day, unsupported raft trip down the Grand Canyon’s Colorado River, it seemed a lot was expected of us.

“Rub it on the tummy?” was the answer that broke the silence.

A few people chuckled, which didn’t help.

“You have all watched and understood the instructional DVD now, haven’t you?!”

Dressed in a khaki uniform and bearing a striking resemblance to Smokey Bear, Maggie was the epitome of the US National Parks Service. A strong woman used to dealing with fools. It was obvious that Maggie spent much of her time driving around the park enforcing the myriad rules. She made it clear that she was a woman just as happy to sleep out under the stars as she was to taser anyone who stepped “outta line”.

“Folks aren’t scared of my gun because they think I won’t shoot. But they know I will happily taser ‘em,” she warned.

We had met Maggie the day before. We were rigging our rafts in the specially designated area for private groups that were due to launch the following day. She informed us that our permit would be revoked if we didn’t remove our two

plastic Pelican cases and a cap from a bench that was for reserved for “day visitors only”.

She was also polite enough, though, to inform us that if our buoyancy vests were not “US Coast Guard Approved” we would not be getting on the river. She then enquired about a host of paperwork that we did not have. It had not started well with Maggie.

Finally the answer: “Do not ADVANCE TOWARDS the condor, do not FEED the condor, do not ENGAGE WITH the condor, in ANY WAY!”

The Grand Canyon is 446km long and sinks to a depth of 1600m. And a trip through it along the Colorado River is one of the world’s great river trips. Commercial tours run from April to October. There is a weighted, lottery system for private permits and one private trip leaves each day. We chose to do our trip in autumn so there would be no motorised, commercial trips on the river with us and, being slightly out of prime season, our odds in the lottery would be higher.

Organising a 21-day river trip is a bit like organising a wedding in another country, and then kicking on for the honeymoon, for another three weeks with 14 of your mates. Thankfully, there are many outfitting companies that are set up to sort out all the issues and supply everything you need. Yes, everything.

Our outfitters supplied all the rafts and associated gear, and all food and cooking equipment. The menu alone stretched to over one hundred pages. The company picked us up at our hotel and drove us, and all our gear, to the river in a semi-trailer. Best of all, they provided a concierge service to help us navigate through the ocean of questions from Ranger Maggie.

Against the seemingly impossible khaki-clad odds we made it onto the river, leaving Lees Ferry only a few hours late and drifting quietly but excitedly towards three weeks of adventure. Within the first hour we floated into the immense canyon. What we didn’t know was that we would not emerge again until only a short time before the end of our trip. Our world was to be dominated by vertical walls and slot canyons for the next 21 days.

Everything about the Grand Canyon is big to a point of being almost overwhelming. The canyon walls change colour as you progress down the river, as the water cuts through an array of geology. The guidebook to the river has 50 pages of maps showing all the features and campsites ahead and you can even download a PDF that shows sunrise and sunset times for every campsite for every day of the year. It’s mind-boggling trying to come to grips with all this information and how much awaits further downstream. Thankfully, our outfitters supplied us with deckchairs and snacks each evening, which we washed down with a variety of adult beverages whilst sitting on the sandy beaches, coming to grips with everything.

The campsites on the river are something to behold; all but one on our trip was a sandy beach. Many are located near some type of off-river feature, whether it be a slot canyon



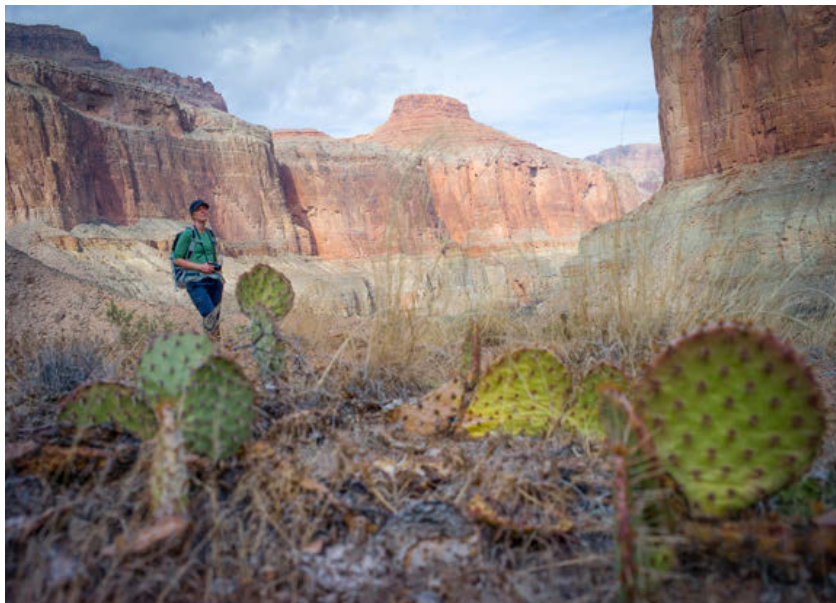
The large volume rapids in the Grand Canyon ensure plenty of fun for rafters and kayakers alike. The water in the Colorado River is very cold, hence the drysuits.

Opposite, top to bottom:

The small paddle boat makes for a fun trip but is often swamped by the large volume rapids that can become very challenging; afternoons off the river provide plenty of opportunities for exploring or relaxing around the campfire.



The Grand Canyon is 446km long and sinks to a depth of 1600m. . . a trip through it along the Colorado River is one of the world's great river trips.





The aqua marine coloured, calcium carbonate rich waters of Havasu Creek mix with the muddy waters of the Colorado River.

One of only a handful of photos of Seymour Dubendorff running a rapid during the Stone Expedition in Marble Canyon on October 31, 1909.



83-7 629



Top: Rachael Alderman peers into the depths of Deer Creek canyon one of the most spectacular side trips on the canyon.
Bottom: One of the many flat sections deep in the middle of the canyon offers plenty of time for contemplation.

Even the large oar boats
cop a pounding from the
Colorado River's rapids.



South Canyon campsite is typical of the spectacularly placed beach campsites throughout the canyon.



The technique was to line up at the top of the rapid, keep the boat straight and plough through anything that got in the way.

or ruins from the Anasazi people. There are usually trails leading out of the campsites and up onto the cactus-covered terraces allowing sweeping views and endless opportunities for photography.

Our flotilla consisted of four oar boats — the river equivalent of a large 4WD — a paddleboat — let's just call it a Suzuki Swift — and five kayaks. No one on the trip had rowed an oar boat before. They were large and heavy. Each one had an Esky large enough to hold a body in and a couple of 9kg gas bottles to power our stoves, along with food and personal gear. We estimated each weighed around a tonne. It turned out that driving an oar boat down a large rapid was not unlike driving a 4WD. The technique was to line up at the top of the rapid, keep the boat straight and plough through anything that got in the way. The paddleboat however was a completely different story. Paddleboats are rarely used on the canyon and the little Suzuki was not quite up to the task. It was dwarfed by many of the rapids and was often on the verge of flipping.

The Grand Canyon is known for its large volume — but not overly technical — rapids. In short, the lines down the rapids are not difficult, but if you do make a mistake you will most likely end up in a house-sized hole that will eat you and your raft alive. It will then spit you out looking something like a re-use shop. You, your friends and all your worldly belongings then usually face a long swim in the fast,

freezing water. It is the temperature of the water that is the biggest risk and the cause of many of the deaths on the river. The water is released from the bottom of Glen Canyon Dam and averages a temperature of around 5 degrees year round. The shock of falling into water this cold, and the fast onset of hypothermia, is a real danger.

The idea of blowing my dry-suit up so I resembled a Michelin Man had never really occurred to me but, when my friend and guide of our paddle boat, Marcus, suggested it, it seemed perfectly reasonable. I pulled on the rubber gasket around my neck and blew down into my suit until I was red in the face and my arms and legs were swollen to absurd proportions. There was no question in our minds what was about to happen. The Suzuki Swift was going to be eaten alive. We were at the top of the famed Lava Falls rapid — the river's largest rapid — and we were about to get a pasting in our little boat. The decision to paddle the rapid was based solely on the idea that 20 seconds of sheer terror was better than one hour lugging the raft along a portage track. Lava Falls had surprised us, as it was considerably larger than all the other rapids on the river and at the current river level, there was no obvious or easy line through it. It was a messy rapid of large, exploding waves and even larger holes. If you google "Lava Falls" you can spend quite a while on Youtube watching the many hapless fools who have ended up in the



Scott Williams lines his raft up at the top of another long rapid. These oar boats carry all the gear for the trip and generally weigh around a tonne fully loaded. Manoeuvring them in a rapid takes a great deal of strength and skill.

Three weeks allows plenty of time to get into the rhythm of river life. It's a simple life. . . the anxiety and trepidation flows away.

“white room” halfway down. We were about to join those ranks. So certain of our fate, we had determined that only two people should be in the raft – fewer people to rescue.

Three weeks allows plenty of time to get into the rhythm of river life. It's a simple life, and after the first few days, the anxiety and trepidation flows away. The days are spent floating along in awe of the surroundings. The afternoons are set aside for exploring the side canyons and Native American ruins. The canyon is a place where you often feel small, really small, but in a good way.

I had almost doubled in size by inflating my dry-suit, but I was feeling smaller than ever as we headed out into the main current. We had a plan: paddle hard into the first large wave, crash through it and repeat, until the inevitable, then... swim for our lives. We went up the face of the wave looking something like the fishing boat in *The Perfect Storm*. We were in a great position and we hit the exploding top of the wave with all we had. In a nanosecond it became crystal clear that all we had was nowhere near enough. Our little raft was thrown sideways through the air about four meters. In heroic fashion I fell backwards into the middle of the raft. I may have squealed. We still had around 100m of rapids to go. Marcus yelled at me, I yelled back. It seems men like yelling when they think the worst is coming. For the next 20 seconds our raft pulled more moves than an aerial ski jumper. We yelled and yelled, but somehow, against the odds, stayed upright.

One of the truly great things about big whitewater is that no one can hear you screaming, and acts of mediocrity and sheer stupidity can sometimes be confused with skill and bravery.

Trips down the canyon vary greatly. In summer, the temperatures soar and the river level rises and falls as the water is used to power the air conditioners of Las Vegas. In winter, it's a battle to find sun, which only reaches the canyon floor for a short time each day. Despite the volume of people who raft the river each year (approximately 30,000) it is impressively clean and, I guess, we have Maggie and the US Parks Service to thank for that. Sometimes all those rules have a purpose. I would, however, just love to rub a condor's tummy, just once.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Trips on the Grand Canyon leave from two places: Flagstaff, Arizona and Las Vegas, Nevada. Flagstaff is a great mountain town with lots of other outdoor activities nearby. Vegas has casinos.

Access: National Park Service
www.nps.gov/grca/index.htm

Gear hire: We used Canyon REO. The service was exceptional and very reasonably priced.
www.canyonreo.com

Guide book: The RiverMaps Guide to the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon is a must-have guidebook. It's durable and waterproof with USGS topo maps and excellent descriptions of river features.

Time out: The number of activities and destinations within a few hours drive of Flagstaff are amazing. The mountain biking at Sedona is especially good.



Once paddlers get on the river, they are shadowed by the steep cliff walls of the Grand Canyon for most of the journey.



Paddling Emerald Lake in
Yoho National Park, Canada.

// SHUTTERSTOCK

OUT THERE



WHETHER IT'S
PADDLING, MTB/
CYCLE TOURING, FEMALE
ADVENTURES OR
A VEHICLE-BASED JOURNEY,
"OUT THERE" HAS IT COVERED!

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Road Trippin' p84



Bike Lane p90

next weekend p94



Paddle time

Welcome to Paddle Time. Paddling is one of the *AG Outdoor's* core focus activities and it's easy to see why: paddling gives direct access to nature, offering a different perspective on waterborne adventures. With Australia's massive coastline, and an equally large number of rivers and lakes, it's not surprising that every third vehicle you see on the roads has a type of watercraft attached, as people head out in search of adventure in or on the Big Blue. Paddle Time will cover all aspects of the paddling scene, from detailing Australasian paddling destinations to paddle gear tests, as well as expert advice and tips on technique from some of the country's most experienced paddlers. We will be covering all paddling disciplines, from sea and whitewater kayaking through to canoeing, rafting, stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) and Olympic paddle sports. Get ready to jump on board!

DESTINATION

Trailing water

Feel like exploring some of NSW's premier rivers via paddle-power? Check out the state's best kept secret: the NSW Canoe & Kayak Trail network.

WORDS JUSTIN WALKER



HOW MANY PEOPLE know about the NSW Canoe & Kayak Trail network? Australia's most populous state has a well set-up paddling trail network encompassing some of its most famous – and culturally rich – rivers. Plus, most of these rivers are ideal for family-based canoe/kayak camping adventures. Go to the Land and Property Management Authority website – www.lpma.nsw.gov.au/about_recreation/canoe_and_kayak_trails – and you can access all the info you need on any of the official canoe trails, including some excellent maps, complete with GPS coordinates for the various public reserves located at each river that allow access to boaters.

Yep, it sounds pretty close to perfect for water-based explorers. Now it's just a matter of picking and choosing which one to paddle first.

HAWKESBURY/NEPEAN RIVER SYSTEM CANOE & KAYAK TRAIL

These paddles are close to Sydney and offer a choice of three separate trails – the Nepean, Colo and Hawkesbury rivers (50km, 30km and 83.5km respectively). You should aside time to explore all three, as each offers a unique experience and, with your Land and Property Management Authority

maps in hand, it is just a matter of planning which river to paddle first.

Access to the Hawkesbury is the most straightforward – there are myriad put-in points accessed through public land – and this huge river is a great introduction to paddling a canoe trail, either as a series of one-day adventures or as a multiday expedition; accommodation options are plenty here – caravan/camping grounds, water ski resorts and B&Bs are scattered along the river's banks – as is a plethora of wildlife.

One thing you do need to be aware of while floating along checking out the scenery on the Hawkesbury is its popularity with powerboats and water-skiers. Obey the rules of the water and paddle on the right-hand side of the river and you should be fine; most boaters are well aware of the Hawkesbury's popularity with kayakers and canoeists and will give you a wide berth. Answer them with a wave of thanks and everyone's happy.

The Hawkesbury section of this network travels from Yarramundi to Wiseman's Ferry, over a distance of 83.5km, and can be broken down into six day-sections (Yarramundi-North Richmond; North Richmond-Windsor; Windsor-Ebenezer; Ebenezer-Cumberland Reach; Cumberland



PADDLE CHECKLIST

1 Before even thinking about putting in and dipping a paddle, make sure you have checked the relevant river levels. All states have online water level websites; the NSW one (relevant to this story) is: www.waterinfo.nsw.gov.au. This site (like all of them) is updated daily and is crucial to planning your water adventure.

2 As with any remote area travel, whether on foot, in a vehicle or on the water, make sure you leave full trip route details (departure location, nights spent away and return date) with a family member and, if possible, with the local authorities at your departure point.

3 Make sure every person in the canoe/kayak is wearing a Personal Flotation Device – Type 2 (PFD). Also ensure every paddler has a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water in their craft.

4 Pack in the relevant maps (and compass) and know how to read them. A GPS is also handy as a backup.

5 A spare paddle (or two if more craft are accompanying you) is essential – as is a repair kit for any dings/holes you may incur in your craft.

PADDLING CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

- 6** Rope or throw line should be permanent in each craft.
- 7** Waterproof containers (hard case versions are preferred; dry bags can be used as well) for clothing, camping gear and food.
- 8** First-aid kit is a must – as is the knowledge to use it.
- 9** Lightweight tarp. These are very handy for campsites by the river/on the beach for extra shade, for the cooking area and for additional protection in wet weather.
- 10** Ideally, travel with at least one more canoe/kayak. If you do get into trouble, having someone there, on the water, to help you could avert a potentially dangerous situation.



The proper safety gear is essential when you're out on the water, regardless of how confident you think you are in the liquid stuff.



Reach-Lower Portland; and Lower Portland-Wisemans Ferry) or you could turn it into a multiday touring affair, camping at caravan parks or, as part of the Windsor-Ebenezer section, in Cattai National Park for a wilder experience. The Hawkesbury is rated for beginner paddlers but it is still essential to check tides (best to paddle with it if possible) and winds before setting out; there's nothing more miserable than paddling against the tide or the wind; it can make what sounds like an awesome trip pretty awful.

For a family-based paddle adventure, the Nepean River section is ideal. At around 25km one-way, this makes for a great adventure, starting from an easy put-in point at either Tench Reserve at Penrith, on the river's eastern side, or from the Nepean Rowing Club (accessed by turning right before the Nepean Bridge), also on the eastern bank but a bit further up the river. This route can be paddled in either direction, as the water here is non-tidal, but wind direction will be a factor in which direction you paddle (and whether you decide to only paddle one way or opt for the return journey).

The Nepean River is also busy with (obviously) other paddlers, rowers and also powerboats/water skiers, so remember to be aware of this. The highlights for braving this busy waterway are a glimpse of the huge wall of Warragamba Dam, as well as the chance to introduce your children/family to the delights of paddling on calm water. Once you've all gained confidence on the Nepean,

the more remote Colo River beckons.

The lower Colo River offers an escape from the busier Nepean and also the chance to experience an easy-ish overnight water journey. This part of the Colo is tidal so your best option for exploring this area is to follow the tide and head downstream, starting from the Upper Colo Recreation Reserve. The finish, at Lower Portland's Skeleton Rocks Reserve, is 30km downriver, meaning a two-day journey with a camp at Colo at the 16km mark. Colo River Holiday Park offers campsites and barbecue areas.

The second section – from Colo to Lower Portland – takes you through some spectacular narrow gorges and thick bushland, with plenty of sandy beaches on which to pull up for a rest or lunch. The only caveat with paddling the Colo River is to make sure you check the water level carefully; if it is too high you will have to portage around the low-height Upper Colo Bridge. If it's too low, you'll have to drag your canoe over some short sections.

TUMUT RIVER CANOE & KAYAK TRAIL

For the more adventurous paddlers, the 95km Tumut River Canoe Trail is a must-do. With an abundance of bush campsites along the river's banks, plus the slight challenge of paddling a river classified as a Grade 1 (some small rapids) the Tumut makes a fantastic multiday adventure for the more experienced paddler.

The Tumut River is best run during summer, ➤



Left: Wisemans Ferry is one of the spectacular locations along the Hawkesbury River Canoe & Kayak Trail.



when the Snowy Mountain Hydro Electric Scheme releases water after the snowmelt. The trail starts at the bottom of the Blowering Dam wall and finishes where it joins the Murrumbidgee River near Gundagai. The landscape you paddle through over the recommended four to five days comprises a mix of crown and pastoral lands. The river also allows for easy access to put-in points and for any support vehicles, with the Land and Property Management Authority maps available online showing vehicle routes to each section's finish point and marking potential overnight campsites at reserves/camp/caravan parks.

For a day trip – especially if it is family-based – a great option is to paddle the 16km/three-hour Jones Bridge Reserve-Junction Park Lions Reserve section. This follows the river as it ambles around the town of Tumut, making meals, accommodation and car shuttling from start to finish nice and easy, while still offering the canoeing experience for the young'uns without having to commit to an overnight trip.

Of course, if you're really keen – and after having finished the full Tumut River trail – you can just keep paddling, down the mighty Murrumbidgee...

MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER CANOE & KAYAK TRAIL

This canoe trail is huge – an epic 230km – and takes you from the heights of Nanangroe Reserve (around 34km west of Yass) just down from the Snowy

Mountain Scheme's Burrinjuck Dam, to the fertile farmlands surrounding Wagga Wagga. As with the Tumut River, the best times to paddle the Murrumbidgee canoe trail are from September through to March. There are seven sections of this canoe trail, so you can either break them up into day/overnight paddles, or go for the full monty of a week or more on the river, which would be our pick.

Along this trail you will find myriad riverside reserves for camping and canoe/kayak put-in, as well as some fantastic scenery. The trail passes through some true western NSW/outback landscapes and you'll move between willow and gum shadowed sections to barren and exposed parts of the river, with plenty of wildlife to see. This trail is not for the faint-hearted, however; sections can take between five-and-a-half hours and eight hours of paddling each day, and even longer as your efforts and speed will be governed by the speed of the river's flow. Still, if you're committed to the full trail and are well prepared, you won't be disappointed as you retrace the route taken by those brilliant paddle steamers of yesteryear. And best of all – at trail's end – is Wagga Wagga, one of NSW's most famous and hospitable inland cities.

MACQUARIE RIVER CANOE & KAYAK TRAIL

Named after Lachlan Macquarie, the last governor of the colony of New South Wales, this river forms (along with the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Barwon-Darling rivers) part of the Murray-Darling basin. The river takes paddlers through a part of

For a family-based paddle adventure, the Nepean River section of this trail is ideal.

NSW that offers everything from huge river red gums lining its banks, through to a wide variety of native birds and animals. Starting in the central-western NSW town of Wellington, the Macquarie trail snakes 150km northwest through the regional centre of Dubbo before finishing in Narromine. This trail (best travelled during summer after the annual release of water from Burrendong Dam) starts at Wellington's Oxley Park Reserve and, on average, will take fit paddlers around five to six hours per day to complete. Along the way there are plenty of Crown Land reserves for camping – and where there are no reserves, nearby towns offer excellent accommodation and dining options.

A stand-out section of this trail is Bril Bral Reserve-Butlers Falls Reserve, on day three, which has plenty of sandy beaches on which to camp or stop for lunch, plus it is fast-flowing, making for an exciting day in the boat. If you can, it's well worth doing the full trail. The experiences along the way – ranging from remote bush camping to dossing down in the hospitable country towns along the river – make this a hidden gem of western NSW.



MissAdventure

MissAdventure is a like-minded community for women that charge the adventure and outdoor and adventure life. Bringing the girls together into an adventure alliance, this is where we can share inspiration, gear, travel ideas and more. We don't care about your age, your background or your fitness level, if you've got the wanderlust spirit, you're already one of us.

Don't hold back



MY NAME IS CAROLINE and I'm a fellow adventurous spirit with a mission to share the joys of the outdoor life and see more women outside and participating in action sports and adventure.

These regular pages are a place for us girls to share stories, advice and tid bits and I welcome your contribution and feedback. Named MissAdventure for the obvious play on words, it is my belief that it is through our misadventures that we create our greatest stories and experience our strongest personal growth.

So whether it is up or down a mountain, through the air or deep in the sea, if you exist to explore our wild planet and experience life, then I'd like to invite you to join the female adventure alliance we are creating.

The MissAdventure Alliance believes in following our fears to the edge of risk and pushing our personal boundaries to discover our potential. We appreciate the majestic playground called Earth and our curiosity is insatiable. We explore,

risk, dare and dream and we relish in the blood, the sweat and tears of the challenge.

In these pages we will admire the exceptional feats of the elite females around us but also be a bridge for the everyday woman to get involved in the outdoor lifestyle, perhaps for the first time or in a more serious way.

I'd like to see our alliance become champions of the journey, to cheer the slow and barrack for the beginners. I think it's as important to honour the groundwork as much as we respect the record breakers.

So let's take a journey together and at the end of the day, our feet will be dirty, our hair will be messy and our eyes will be sparkling...

MISSADVENTURE



When you're on an adventure, a top priority is getting enough fuel and what to carry with you on the trail. Being active means, yes, you can get away with eating more than usual, but before you reach for the high sugar, no nutrition option, check out these energy dense treats from our favourite highly active, adventure-loving chefs, Luke and Scott.



BANANA SCRAMBLE

Around the campfire after an epic day in the outdoors, re-fuel and re-energise with this no-fuss recipe. You can even do the measuring, mixing and preparation prior to your adventure.

1tbs coconut oil
1 banana
3 tbs rolled quinoa
1tbs nut butter (any will do)
1 tsp maple syrup
1tsp shredded coconut
1tsp cinnamon
1tbs chia seeds
Pinch of salt

In a bowl mash all the ingredients together. Heat the coconut oil in a fry pan. Once hot pop in the mixture into the pan and flatten down with a wooden spoon or spatula. Cook on one side until golden brown and flip over and cook the other. Once both sides are brown remove from heat and enjoy!

DESTINATION

Terminal surf stoke

Luxury travel and adventure sports tend to be mutually exclusive, even polar opposites, but they don't have to be.

WORDS CAROLINE PEMBERTON PHOTOS JAMES MILLS

ADVENTURE SPORTS often take place in testing environments and are physically demanding, rough and tumble type activities. They are hugely rewarding, addictive and there's nothing better than that rush of adrenaline Mother Nature dollops out. Cocktails by the pool they are not... or could they be?

One woman shaking up the paradox and marrying the best of both worlds is Suzanne Hart, founder of SheTravels, who with her extensive background in event management has seamlessly put together fully female (sorry boys) surf trips to Bali, which mix all the benefits of surfing in paradise with relaxing in luxury.

I appreciate that many of you might not be surfers, yet you've probably all heard that turn of phrase 'only a surfer knows the feeling'. And you've no doubt wondered why surfers excitedly pelt to the water, boards under their arms, running through the sand as if their lives depend on it. Why does this sport have such a powerful influence across culture, gender and background?

As a beginner – I am about a year into my surf journey – I can attest to an essence underlying the obsession that is real. Surfing is something that soaks into your soul along with saltwater and it infects you. It brings both a relaxation and simultaneously an all-encompassing joy. It's the thrill of being in the right place at the right moment, with no room for thought and taking a ride on the energy of the ocean. It's a disease, labelled 'surf stoke' and once you catch it, it's terminal.

When you're just starting out, if you can persist beyond the first days flopping off your board, and relax in the washing machine as the waves tumble you, you will be sweetly rewarded. The first time the momentum of a wave picks up your board and you stand atop its surge, you will understand what all the hullabaloo is about.

Suzanne's SHESurfs trips cater to every type of woman; she regularly has 60-plus young at hearts learning to surf with her and she guarantees that each of them will stand up by the time she's done with them. On our recent trip, complete beginner Kelly was standing up on day one and surfing the reef break by day three!

Suzanne's weeklong trips are all about the waves, and what better place to find them than Australia's favourite overseas surfing destination, Bali. This island paradise is idyllic for a surf adventure, with consistent waves and a variety of breaks suited from beginner to advanced, warm water, sunshine, affordability and \$6 massages.

SHESurfs is a wonderfully supportive trip to find your feet on a board and, the best part, at the end of a great session in the water you retire to a gorgeous private villa with day spas, cocktails and scrumptious food.

Surfing is something that soaks into your soul along with the saltwater and it infects you.

Suzanne knows how to pamper her guests with nice touches like a little welcome pack on arrival, which includes some travel goodies, a sarong and a rash vest. And with plenty of local knowledge – she's been travelling here since she was 16 – she knows all the best restaurants.

Suzanne also has the best surfing spots sussed, and works closely with friendly local surf guides who have an incredibly intuitive way of teaching. Frengkie, our head guide, told me if I just relaxed and felt the wave beneath me, then I'd know how and when to paddle. His advice couldn't have been more on the money. In true kook-style, my enthusiasm meant I tended to paddle at anything and exhaust myself before I'd even caught a wave. Not to worry; if you needed a little bit of an extra shunt the boys seemed to appear out of nowhere, just in time to push you into the wave so you could focus on the long rides.

Each day the waves, wind and tide were checked for us to ensure we found the best conditions to suit our experience. Most often we'd find ourselves on Kuta reef at sunset. We'd hop off the outrigger, paddle out and watch the gun surfers shredding along, and inspiring us all.



COCOA BARK

Amazing bush walking or trekking snacks. Both are a rich source of fat and energy and taste bloody great. Packed full of superfoods and no nasties and low GI these snacks will keep you going for longer. Ideally your trial snacks ought to be nutrient dense to keep you fuelled for endurance.

1 cup cocoa butter
6-7 tbs cocoa
2tbs rice malt syrup
1/2 cup toasted shredded coconut
1tsp vanilla extract
1 tbs bee pollen (Optional)
2 tbs petitas
2 tbs golden linseeds
2 tbs chia seeds
Small Pinch sea salt

Fill a saucepan 1/3 full of water, place a heat resistant bowl over the saucepan (ensure the bowl is not touching the water)

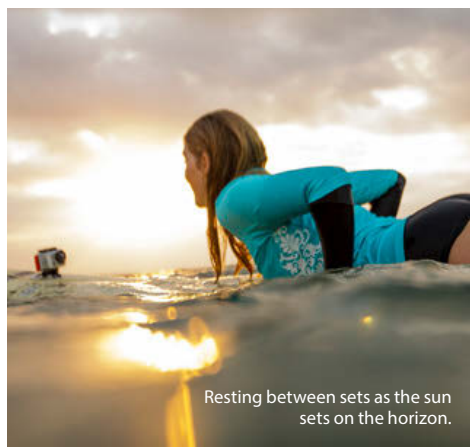
Put the water on a simmer and pop the cocoa butter in the bowl. Once melted throw in the cocoa, salt and vanilla extract and gently whisk together.

Put a fry pan on a high heat for 1-2 mins. Pop the shredded coconut in and remove from the heat. Keep tossing the coconut to ensure it doesn't burn in the residual heat.

Line a baking tray with baking paper and throw in the coconut. Remove the bowl from the pan and pour over the coconut. While the chocolate is still wet sprinkle in the seeds and bee pollen.

Pop it in the fridge for 2 hours. Once chilled break a piece off and enjoy. Wrap in some cling wrap and take it with you.





Resting between sets as the sun sets on the horizon.

We'd sit on the shoulder and just as they'd drop off, we'd hop on, giving us an uncrowded break.

Surfing with the girls, we'd laugh and cheer for one another. It wasn't competitive or territorial; we were just a bunch of friends catching waves for the pure joy of it.

Between surfs, there was plenty of time to shop and explore Seminyak, or relax at the villa. The trip includes some wonderful non-surf related activities to give you a taste of Balinese culture. At one stage we found ourselves amongst the rice paddies of Ubud, where we joined chef Ketut and his team who taught us how to cook a traditional Balinese meal. With fresh local ingredients we learnt what goes into preparing the fabulous food we had been enjoying. When you're surfing so much, you have a bottomless stomach and every reason to indulge. The best bit, of course, is enjoying the fruits of your labour, overlooking the rainforest with a Bintang and a six-course feast.

Bali has long been a favourite destination for Australians, but this trip is sure to open your mind to another dimension of what is on offer. Being in the ocean everyday, the sun on your face and the salt on your skin, somehow helps integrate you into the destination even further. It's the little things from the supportive guides who share your successes as if they were their own, to immersing in the rich culture, to resting your weary body in the lap of luxury. Indeed, there's not much missing from this marriage of adventure and indulgence, and rarely has it been done so well.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Adventure: SheTravels offers 7 day, 6 night female surf trips in Bali, staying in a luxury villa in Seminyak, including breakfast each day, a day trip and cooking class in Ubud, 2 hours of luxury spa treatments and airport transfers. Trips are AU\$3,180 (including goods & services tax – GST)

Getting there: You can choose to fly either Jetstar, Virgin or Garuda to Denpasar, Indonesia

More info: www.Shetravels.net.au



SURF'S UP

Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to see more from this adventure.

REVIEWS

Gear we adore

OLYMPUS TOUGH TG-3

\$399 www.olympus.com.au

The Tough is always in the top of my rucksack, regardless of the adventure. It's a seriously rugged camera (waterproof down to 15m, freeze proof to -10 degrees and crush proof up to 100kg) that instead of being a hindrance and something you have to protect, is a compact point-and-shoot you can whip out regardless of the conditions. I use it all the time in the surf for happy snaps and get some wicked shots. It has a fantastic image stabiliser as well as a high speed f2.0 lens which makes high quality images with reduced blur possible in low light, along with inbuilt Wifi & GPS features.



SANUK YOGA SLING 2

\$54.95 www.sanuk.com

There's nothing better than pulling off your boots at the end of a long day and putting on fresh flip flops for around camp. With a footbed made from squishy yoga mat material, the Sanuk Yoga Sling 2 offers welcome relief for tired tootsies – and being so light makes them a justifiable option to carry as a secondary shoe. They also make a great transition shoe whether you are on an adventure or out to lunch.



ADIDAS TYCANE SUNNIES

\$225 (non-polarised)

\$290 (polarised) www.adidas.com.au

Developed for sailing, the Tycane sunglasses' wrap-around design offer complete protection for your eyes and are ideal for most action sports. With polarised lenses and a water and oil repelling coating on the glass, they stay clean and clear for longer even in salty, or muddy water. They are one of the lightest models around; we found them most useful as a cross-over to take you from land to the sea!

INSPIRED BY GIPPSLAND



Beneath the canopy of the glorious Mountain Ash giants, nature trails meander through lush fern gullies to serene little picnic spots, where all that can be heard is the distant call of the elusive lyrebird. This is Tarra Bulga rainforest. For more inspiration visit inspiredbygippsland.com.au





Welcome to *AG Outdoor's* Road Trippin' section. Vehicle-based family touring and adventuring in Australia and New Zealand is easy and loads of fun, whether you drive a sedan, station wagon, compact SUV or 4WD.

AGO will be covering vehicle-based family destinations in this section, and providing advice on everything from keeping the kids entertained during those long drives, through to finding that perfect campsite. We'll also be testing vehicle-based adventure equipment you could ever need to make your trip a hassle-free one.

So load up the family, strap the kayak/canoe/tinny on top, tie the bikes to the back, throw the camping gear in, and point your mobile basecamp toward that adventurous road ahead.

DESTINATION

Top end dreaming

Kakadu National Park is one of Australia's largest national parks, and arguably its most famous. This park, around three hours east of Darwin, is a fantastic destination for a vehicle-based family adventure.

WORDS JUSTIN WALKER



COVERING AN AREA of almost 20,000 square kilometres, Kakadu is Australia's largest national park, and it's oh, so beautiful. Kakadu contains all you could want when it comes to a genuine Top End family adventure. From the millennia-old Aboriginal culture seemingly ingrained in every rock and waterway, through to the ease with which you can escape the larger crowds of visitors to camp in a remote bush setting, Kakadu NP has it all.

TIME TO DREAM

At a minimum, we'd recommend at least five days in Kakadu NP. The park's size – and the fact the majority of highlights are spread well apart – means you'll be driving a fair bit in between each campsite/destination. A clockwise route, starting from the northern entrance via Darwin, and working your way east then south to Mary River Roadhouse encompasses the best of this park.

Not long after entering the park, turn left and follow the track to West Alligator Head. This track is dry season-access only (usually from July) but takes you past the beautiful Two Mile and Four Mile waterholes (be careful of saltwater crocs near these waterways) before traversing the Manassie Floodplain and finishing on the beach at West

Alligator Head (Waldak Irmbal). There is a bush campsite here (with toilets) and plenty of opportunities to explore the rocky coastline and expansive beaches. Again, be aware that this is saltwater crocodile country (the author has seen a 5m-long saltie basking in the sun at this beach) so no swimming, and be careful near any creeks or other waterways.

ROCKIN' IT

Returning the same way the next day, rejoin the Arnhem Highway and continue further into the park, passing the South Alligator River on the way to the Bowali Visitor Centre (also the park's HQ). It's well worth spending a bit of time here at the centre; the displays are fantastic plus you can get all the latest information on any road/track closures in the park. A further 39km along the Arnhem Highway is one of the park's do-not-miss attractions: Ubirr and its exceptional rock art – plus the amazing sunset over the East Alligator River floodplains. A few hours spent at Ubirr exploring the extensive rock art sites – then sitting back on top of the Ubirr escarpment to watch the sun dip below the horizon – is a brilliant experience. There's also a campsite at the nearby Border Store, at Merl.

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE RIG

1 TOURING TENT

For family camping trips, a spacious and easy to set up tent is a must. Ideally, a tent made from lightweight but tough polycotton/canvas is the best choice, purely for longevity and durability. Look for a tent that has plenty of ventilation (mesh windows and vents up high and down low to keep air moving through the interior). If possible (and if you can fit it in your vehicle) opt for a tent that features additional awnings so even if it is raining you can keep the kids entertained undercover with board games, books or other activities.

2 ROOF RACKS/BARS

A set of roof racks is at the top of our list when setting up an adventure rig. Being able to safely and securely transport watercraft (sea kayaks, canoes, paddles, etc), bikes (MTB or road bikes), or for affixing a luggage box makes racks an absolute essential. Reputable brands include Yakima, Thule and Rhino Racks, and each of these companies offer a multitude of gear-carrying systems that are very well designed and – in some cases – make loading large items, such as canoes or kayaks, up top much easier.

3 FIRST AID KIT

A first aid kit should be a permanent fixture in your vehicle, regardless of whether you're on an adventure or not. The other permanent thing: keeping your first aid skills up to date.

4 SERVICED VEHICLE

Book your vehicle in for a complete service and make sure you mention to the mechanic/service manager that you're planning a big road trip. They can then check anything that needs replacing in view of the distances you plan on covering, plus they can advise on what easy-to-fit spare parts to take with you – and show you how to fit them.

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE RIG (CONTINUED)

5 ROOFTOP POD

You see these everywhere today and with good reason: being able to load bulky, lightweight gear (think: sleeping bags, clothing, etc.) in a waterproof/weatherproof roof-mounted pod means you can keep the heavier gear in your vehicle, down low in the cargo area, thus not adversely affecting your vehicle's handling (heavy gear on your roof will change the centre of gravity of your car/wagon/4WD and is not recommended). Many rooftop pods are narrow enough that you can still squeeze in a bike rack (or two) up top as well, making the best use of your vehicle's rooftop space.

6 FULLY INFLATED SPARE TYRE

Before heading off, make sure you check that your spare tyre is fully inflated and has no leaks. There's nothing more disheartening – and potentially trip-ending – than copping a puncture and having no spare to replace it – it really is game over for your journey.

7 PORTABLE POWER PACK

These can be used for a variety of tasks, ranging from powering your portable fridge/freezer (if you have one), to charging your camp lights at night. Charge it up while driving, then sit back and admire the convenience of having a powered campsite, regardless of how far from "civilisation" you are.



For avid wildlife photographers, a sunrise cruise on Yellow Water Billabong should be at the top of your list when visiting Kakadu NP.

EXPLORER MODE

Heading south from Ubirr/Merl (via the Kakadu Highway) for around 60km will see you arrive at the turnoff to Nourlangie Rock (another great rock art site) and Anbangbang Billabong. This essential diversion will take at least half a day; besides the walk around the well-signposted rock art sites at Nourlangie, the easy walk around Anbangbang Billabong is a must-do. Remember to take plenty of water, sunscreen and a sunhat while tackling this walk – and keep clear of the water's edge. All walks in Kakadu around the major sites are relatively short, not only to make them accessible, but because even in the cooler dry season it still gets quite warm. For camping, there are a couple of sites near here (Burdulba, Malabanjbandjdju and Murella Park) and, if you are driving a 4WD, you can also bush camp at Sandy Billabong, accessed via a 4WD-only track off the Nourlangie Rock Road.

GOING DEEP

Speaking of 4WDs, if you are exploring Kakadu with one of these then you cannot miss the adventure of driving the track down to Jim Jim Falls at the edge of escarpment country. If not, don't despair, as there are tour operators who can

take you on this rough-and-tumble trip to one of the park's premier attractions. It is a two-hour drive, but the effort is rewarded with a chance to swim in the waterholes near the falls (the falls themselves run nearly dry early in the dry season). For those a bit nervous of crocs (the parks authorities "clean out" swimming spots after the wet season has finished) you can scramble up the side of Jim Jim Falls to the waterholes above the cliff's edge. A bit further south is Twin Falls, another must-see, especially as you've already made the effort to get down to this part of the park. Then, after all that swimming and chilling out, it's back in the vehicle for the journey out to the Kakadu Highway and then a short drive to the Warradian Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Cooida Lodge, right next to Yellow Water Billabong.

CLOSE CROC ENCOUNTERS

For avid wildlife photographers, a sunrise cruise on Yellow Water Billabong should be at the top of your list when visiting Kakadu NP. This area is packed with all the quintessential Top End photo subjects – crocs, water birds, huge lilies and a sublime sunrise over the water – and you'll chew through a few memory cards. Saltwater crocs



Clockwise from top: the sublime rockpools atop Gunlom Falls; Traditional Owner, Victor Cooper, runs brilliant guided tours in the park; saltwater crocs are the masters of ambush, so be very careful near waterholes; camping options range from swags through to hotel-style accommodation.



VEHICLE TEST

Subaru Forester



ARRIVE AT ANY hiking destination, mountain bike trailhead or camping site and odds-on you will see at least one Subaru Forester, probably more. This mid-sized SUV (or “softroader”) has excellent adventure vehicle credentials. Subaru has built its reputation on its brilliant constant all-wheel drive system that, for the layman, means more traction on loose surfaces, such as national park tracks/roads, etc., thanks to drive going to all four wheels, rather than just two as per your average family sedan/wagon.

The Forester not only features constant all-wheel drive, but also a higher ground clearance (223mm) than your average sedan/wagon, and X-Mode, which controls the vehicle’s throttle to regulate speed on steep slopes and assist with minimising wheelspin on slippery surfaces, ensuring ample traction when travelling up or down steep or uneven terrain. In short, it means you’re more likely to be able to reach that remote destination – and get back again safely.

And speaking of safety, the Forester has a five star ANCAP safety rating – the highest in Australia.

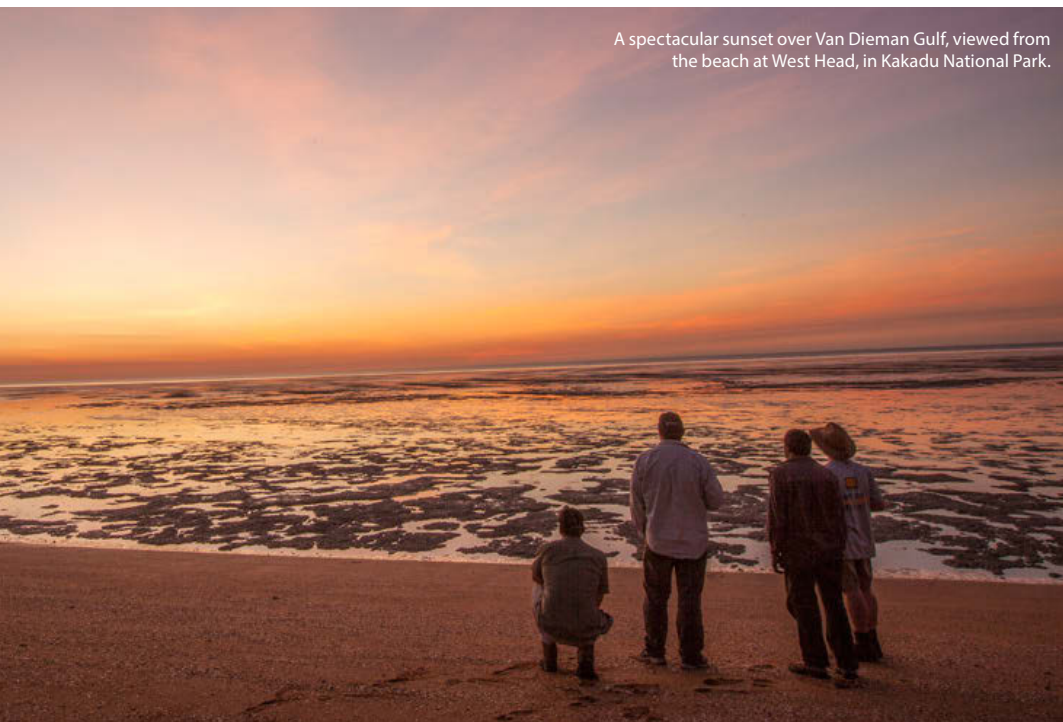
The Forester’s all-round capability, along with a choice of three engines – a 2.5-litre petrol; frugal 2.0-litre turbo-diesel, and sporty 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol – plus high spec levels, plenty of load space and a dynamic driving experience, makes it a great option for the adventurous family.



HIDDEN GEM

Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to watch a video about one of Kakadu's best kept secrets; Koolpin Gorge.





A spectacular sunset over Van Dieman Gulf, viewed from the beach at West Head, in Kakadu National Park.

fear nothing so are not afraid of the boats that cruise Yellow Water Billabong, which means they usually don't divert from their path – a path that can take them right past the viewing boats. Your boat captain will be an indigenous guide so you will gain an insight into how the original residents of Kakadu view their land and its natural inhabitants, as well as hear how their Dreaming stories relate to the creation of this magical landscape. There are few more memorable sounds and sights than that of a saltwater croc circling a drowned gum tree, and slapping its head and tail on the water as it tries to dislodge a bird in the tree's branches. Amazing stuff.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Leaving Coinda Lodge, the journey south along the Kakadu Highway continues to offer up some exciting side trips. The secluded Graveside Gorge (permit required to drive and camp here) is brilliant; Maguk (Barramundi Gorge) is accessed via a dirt road and offers excellent swimming and camping; and the twin highlights of Gunlom Falls (with its amazing plunge pools high above at the top of the waterfall, see main pic) and Koolpin Gorge (Jarrangbarnmi), which also requires a permit, are more than worth it. Both of these places buzz with

the timeless spirit of Kakadu and, as the final points on our tour of this epic national park, are fitting last-night bush accommodation options. If, however, you're keen on digs with a bit more luxury, the Wirnwirnmila Mary River Road House has motel units, caravan sites and campsites, as well as showers and all amenities (including a restaurant/shop and fuel).

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Kakadu NP is around three hours drive – and 171km – from Darwin, via the Stuart Highway, then the Arnhem Highway.

Best time to go: The dry season is the best time to visit Kakadu NP. This is usually from June to September. Temperatures still remain on the warm side during this period, so pack plenty of sunscreen and protective clothing/apparel.

Activities: The national park has a host of activities on offer. Independent walks, interpretive guided walks and tours, indigenous cultural tours, boat cruises, photography, swimming and fishing are all available in the park.

More info: For all things Kakadu NP, go to www.travelnt.com

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE RIG (CONTINUED)

8 PACKING ROUTINE

Employing a regular packing routine takes the stress out of those pre-trip hours. Knowing where each piece of camping equipment, clothing and other “stuff” goes in advance makes loading up the vehicle a hassle-free experience. Knocking up a short list of gear for your children to pack in their own bags makes it fun for them. Oh, and also ensure all of your equipment is secured/tied down – in the unlikely case of an accident, the last thing you want flying around inside the vehicle is loose camping gear. It takes an extra five minutes to tie it all down properly, so do it.

9 FRIDGE/FREEZER

If you can fit a portable fridge/freezer in your vehicle (and you should be able to; they are available in sizes starting at 25 litres, ideal for weekend escapes) then stump up the (considerable) cash and buy one. No, they aren't cheap, but compared to the near-impossible task of keeping fresh food, er, fresh in an ice-filled Esky, they're the best bang for your camp-kitchen buck you will find.

10 MAPS

Smart explorers pack paper maps and a GPS unit. Both come in handy on vehicle-borne adventures and cross-checking your GPS receiver on a paper map is something we'd advise doing regularly during your trip, just to ensure you're still on track. Topographic paper maps offer an awesome overview of the area you are keen to explore and are a fantastic planning tool.



**MTB VID OF
THE ISSUE**

Use the free **viewa** app to scan this page to watch a video see Canadian Brandon Semenuk's winning slopestyle run of 2014.



Bike Lane

The humble bicycle is still one of the world's most efficient modes of transport, and it's a great device to explore the planet. Whether you've been riding all your life or you're just starting your own two-wheeled adventure, the team at AGOutdoor have you covered for gear reviews, trip news and more.

This month, we examine the mental aspects of 24-hour mountain bike racing, investigate a new category of off-road machine and look at a great new event on the Aussie racing calendar. Drop us a line if you want us to check out anything cycling-related, and keep an eye on our Facebook and Instagram pages for all things ride-related.

ADVENTURE

Night sweats

Endurance mountain bike racing is as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. And sometimes things can go wrong upstairs, as Tim Robson found out at this year's Mont 24 Hour.

WORDS **TIM ROBSON**

THE DUST HANDS like talcum powder in the still, warm night air, glowing like malevolent snow in the glare of the lights of hundreds of riders. The huge trees that line much of the Kowen Forest track take on spectral, menacing shapes in the blackness, and the trail that I'd enjoyed so much just four hours ago becomes a new, much scarier, beast.

As I hack my way around the 16km lap, I'm not exactly feeling the bliss of the moment. I'd obviously overdone the training in the last few days, and my legs feel like rolling pins. My form over the tricky terrain is unusually sketchy, and the riders passing me on the narrow sections of the trail seem to be growing exponentially in number.

The final straw comes about eight kilometres in. Hot (I'm overdressed for the surprisingly warm spring night) and tired (it is just on 2am) I come up on the back of a slower rider, who baulks over a rock at exactly the wrong moment. I check up quickly – too quickly for the faster rider on my tail, who sideswipes me, knocking me off the track and down a rock-strewn slope. My expensive rig clatters off a boulder, my prescription glasses fly off into the pitch black, and I end up facedown in a prickly mattress of pine needles.

What little mental robustness I have left at that stage makes its excuses and exits stage-right. Physiologically, I am a beaten man. I am spent, I am bleeding, and it isn't going to get any better tonight.

Eventually, I find my glasses, repair my bike and wearily push back out onto the trail. Every one of the 8000m back to the start/finish line, where a teammate is patiently waiting, is subsequently awful. At the finish line, I tag my teammate away onto his lap, roll back to our campsite and draw a line through my name on the team board, indicating that I am out. I collapse into my sleeping bag, shoes and all, and I don't ride another lap for the rest of the event.

Twenty-four hour racing is astoundingly popular amongst Australian mountain bikers, given just how difficult and expensive the sport can be. Of the almost-2500 riders in this year's Mont 24 race, for example, it's fair to estimate that an average of \$3000 has been spent on bike and equipment per rider, not to mention the investment in time required to attend, compete in and recover from the race. Add to that the stresses and strains of contesting up to six mini-races over a 24-hour period, and it's easy to see why a rider needs as



TECH TIP

This is actually two tips in one:

Grab some electrical tape and wrap a strip around your seatpost where it meets your frame (to mark the height of your post). Next, loosen the allen bolt or quick release on your frame's seatpost clamp and take the seatpost out. If the post doesn't have a thin coating of grease on it, clean the post and the inside of the frame, and apply a thin film of good quality, light weight synthetic grease to the post. Before you re-insert it, though, put a thumbnail-sized dollop inside the post itself. This little bit of spare grease can be used out in the field should any part of your bike need a quick dose of shoosh.

NB: Ignore this tip if you have a carbon-fibre frame or seatpost; use a carbon paste product instead. Some instances of grease swelling carbon-fibres have been documented, meaning your seatpost may seize in place.

NEWS



ROCKY ROAD

Wild Horizons, the team behind the Highland Fling, have come up with a very interesting concept for an event. Known as the Rock & Road, riders will first need to complete an 80km road race in and around the NSW town of Rydal, 20km west of Lithgow, before tackling a 40km mountain bike loop (there is a 40km/25km version, as well). Riders can take on the event individually, or share the pain with a friend.

The event is set down for 17 May, 2015 and all the details can be found at the Wild Horizons website at www.wildhorizons.com.au/rockaroad/.

CRANKWORX HITS NEW ZEALAND

Some of the most talented riders in the world never to strap on a numberplate will descend upon the mountain bike paradise of Rotorua in March, to compete in the infamous Crankworx festival.

The wildly popular event – based in Whistler, British Columbia – is as much a mountain biking festival as it is a multi-discipline contest, and riders can compete in everything from dirt criteriums to ‘whip off’ (jump) contests, enduro, pump track and slopestyle events.

Crankworx will run from 25-29 March 2015. Full details at crankworx.com.



MONT 2015 ENTRIES NOW OPEN

Kowen Forest will welcome back the Mont 24-hour on 28-29 March 2015, just six months after the weather-delayed 2014 event. There's plenty of camping available on site, with shower and toilet facilities laid on by the organisers. Details at selfpropelled.com.au.

NATIONAL PARK-APPROVED TRAIL OPENS IN SYDNEY

The long-awaited National Parks-approved MTB trail development in Garigal National Park (right next door to the famous Manly Dam MTB Trail) is nearly ready for riding. The work was done by TrailScapes, and it's said to be the first MTB-only (as opposed to a multi-purpose) track built in a national park. Check the opening date at nationalparks.nsw.gov.au



AG Outdoor editor, Justin Walker, tackles a night lap at the Mont 24 aboard the long-term Santa Cruz 5010. Events like the Mont are great fun and very social.

The ability to ‘read’ your body, to recover in time for the next lap... will stand a Mont 24 rookie in good stead.

much mental agility as physical prowess.

“It sometimes is a little hard to keep the pace sensible when trying to catch or make up time,” acknowledges World Solo 24-Hour champion Jason English. “I have suffered the consequence of going too hard several times!”

To compete at the front end of the race with guys like Jason requires a superhuman level of fitness, while an average rider with a few months of regular riding and general fitness training behind them can easily manage the rigours of a team-based 24-hour race. The ability to ‘read’ your body, to recover in time for your next lap, and the knowledge to properly replenish your nutritional stocks between laps will stand a Mont 24 rookie in good stead.

“I set heaps of small little goals and have a series of treats or rewards to look forward to when I race,” says Jason. “These rewards can be food-related, such as having a hot slice of pizza, pancakes, soup, protein bars or a coffee.

“They can also be just the reward of seeing the sunrise or sunset, or riding in the dark.”

Careful event planning is also a key to a good

weekend at the Mont, as well as a comfortable campsite. Widescreen projectors, fridges, lounges and rented port-a-loos are just some of the home-away-from-home conveniences we spot at this year's race. The AG Outdoor team's pair of 3x3m shades, gaggle of tents and an old BBQ look a little underdone, by comparison!

Jason has some sage words of advice for those thinking about tackling a solo 24.

“If you can pace yourself for eight hours, you can do a 24 hour,” he tells us. “Being comfortable is the key, both physically and mentally; comfy bike, clothes, shoes. For mental comfort, try playing with caffeine!”

From the excitement of the start to the beauty and wonder of a sunrise lap, from the sheer drudgery of a muddy, cold night lap to the elation of crossing the line at the end of the event, every rider should tackle a 24-hour race; perhaps not as literally as I did, though.

For info, entry, training tips and more on the 2015 Mont 24, click through to selfpropelled.com.au/event/mont-24/



PRODUCT CHECK

Gravel bikes

CYCLING IS AN industry that thrives on inventing niche categories within niche categories, and this new one makes a lot of sense for outdoor types who are keen on covering a bit of distance.

Known as gravel bikes, these machines take the best attributes of a road bike – light weight and efficiency – and combines them with technologies developed for mountain bikes.

The Focus Mares CX 1.0 (pictured) is a great example of a current-spec gravel rig. Its carbon-fibre frame is light and stiff, but still comfortable, while its frame and fork are equipped not only for disc brakes – which are far stronger than rim equivalents – but for wider tyres, too. If you're trekking through the urban jungle, a set of 700 x 25c road tyres will keep you in touch with the pack. Slap on some knobby 700 x 35c rubber, though, and you're ready to hit the dirt.

The Mares also sports thru-axles front and rear. Similar in concept to the way a motorcycle wheel is mounted, a thru-axle wheel arrangement is stiffer and stronger than its quick-release forebears.

A carbon-framed gravel bike doesn't, however, lend itself to true wild-adventure work; while the frames are more than strong enough to tackle almost anything, repairing them is a job best left to experts, and definitely not something that can be done in the field. The Mares also comes in an aluminium-framed version, which would be less susceptible to travel damage, and could be welded in a pinch.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A GRAVEL BIKE

Disc brakes: Shimano hydraulic is currently the best of the bunch

22 speeds: Again, Shimano's 22-speed Ultegra leads the way in the value stakes.

Wide tyres: Most bikes will ship with 700 x 28c, but make sure it'll take 700 x 35c at a minimum

Good fit: If you're stuck between two sizes, opt for the smaller size. You can always use a longer stem and seatpost.

LONG-TERM UPDATE

The Santa Cruz 5010 made its debut under Ed Justin Walker at the Mont 24, which always makes the mechanic in me a bit nervous! Bikes always work better after a couple of hours of use and a re-tensioning of bolts and cables – something we just didn't get a chance to do before the event.

As the Mont is a real mixed bag of steady climbs, tight singletrack and wide-open downhill, we made sure we got a reconnaissance lap in on the day before the race started. While Justin was pretty happy with his general fit on the bike, I raised his seatpost a little, changed the tilt angle of the seat and rolled his handlebars forward slightly to put his wrists in a more natural position.

I also reset his SRAM X0 gears, as the gear cable had loosened a little. It proved a little tricky to tune – a common complaint with 11-speed rear-ends. Tolerances are so tight that just an eighth of a turn of an adjusting screw is the difference between smooth running and a nightmare shift.

Suspension-wise, we set the bike's sag at about 10 percent of the bike's 125mm of rear travel and 140mm of front. Having your rider sit on the bike, fully kitted to race, then measuring via O-rings or zip ties secured to the shock shaft and the fork stanchion is the most reliable method. I like to run a little less sag (more air pressure) on cross-country type events, as it makes the bike a bit nicer to climb. I also like to run a few more psi in the tyres – we started at 32psi front and rear. After dropping 15psi from the forks, the boss pronounced the set-up spot-on.

The 5010 got through the event without a hiccup, with the Ed's tired but smiling face a sure sign that its low centre of gravity and stable steering gave him loads of confidence on the rocky, fast downhills. He even said something about doing the next Mont, as well!



SANTA CRUZ 5010 SPECS

Groupset: SRAM X0 11-speed

Wheels: SRAM Rise 40

Fork: Fox TALAS 34 (120-140mm)

Weight: 12.65kg

Price: \$5750 (aprox – custom build)

⊕ Great handling, easy to ride

⊖ X0 very finicky to tune

WORDS CARLIE O'CONNELL

NEXT WEEKEND

➤ Adventures you can take right now...

Double-up on adventure in Victoria and explore what's on offer at **Mount Hotham** and **Great Otway National Park**.



➤ MOUNT HOTHAM, VICTORIA

For some high altitude adventure, check out this alpine resort and surrounding national park area.

IN THE heart of the Australian Alps National Park, Mount Hotham is best known for its snowy slopes, attracting thousands of tourists every winter. However, as the weather warms and the snow melts away, a plethora of alpine trails, bushland and native wildlife are revealed.

GET INTO IT

Bushwalking/alpine trail running: The bushwalking season opens at the start of November, and there are tracks to suit everyone from beginners to pros. A scheduled free guided bushwalking program operates on most of the major holidays and public holiday weekends between now and Easter. If you prefer to explore solo, you can take to one of the multiple hiking tracks, including Huts Walk and Cobungra Ditch Walking Track, 10km of track at an elevation of just over 1500m. These also connect to other tracks, including

the Hotham to Dinner Plain Ski Trail, accumulating to more than 30km of available track.

The Australian Alps Walking Track (650km) passes through this area and hikers can take on the 60km section between Mount Hotham and Mount Bogong as a five-day hike.

Road and mountain biking:

Boasting the highest bitumen road in Australia, the mountain offers 38km of winding roads if you begin your ascent in the valley town of Harrietteville. Note: the steepest sections are at a grade of 18 percent.

For those who prefer a rougher road there are many 4WD tracks and fire trails through the bush.

Horse riding: Bring your own horse along and ride through Victoria's High Country, or take a guided horseback riding adventure. Dinner Plain Trail Rides offers one-hour beginner rides, as well as two-hour, half-day or full-day rides with bookings.

THE ESSENTIALS

Location: Mount Hotham is 212km northeast of Melbourne. It can be accessed by car from both Omeo (5.5-hour drive from Melbourne) and Bright (4.5-hour drive from Melbourne).

Accommodation: Some lodges are closed for summer but there is still plenty of accommodation options, both in the heart of Hotham and in Dinner Plain, a small town 12km away. Free camping is available at JB Hut, 2km west of Dinner Plain.

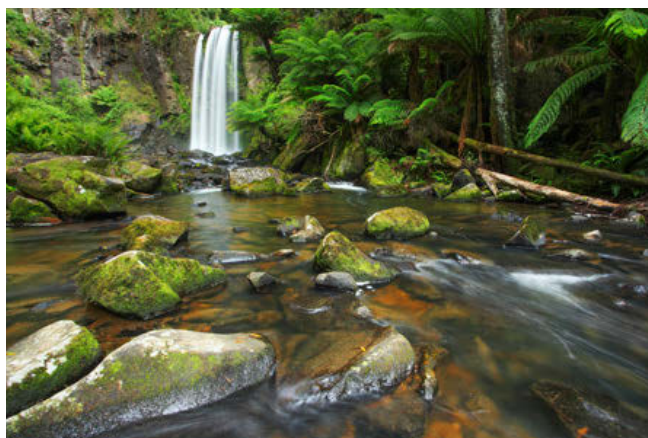
Food/drink: Between Hotham and Dinner Plain there are more than 20 different restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars. Larger supermarkets and more restaurants are available in Bright and Omeo.

Maps: Maps are available on the Mount Hotham website.

More info: www.mthotham.com.au/events-activities/summer-activities

GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK, VIC

From surfing, kayaking and canoeing on tranquil lakes and flowing rivers, to walking, biking and horse riding through tall forests, the Great Otway National Park is an adventure playground.



FORMED IN 2005 through the amalgamation of various former state park and forest areas, the Great Otway National Park is home to some 372 fauna species, including 77 rare and threatened species. Keep on the lookout for iconic species such as the koala, eastern grey kangaroo and platypus, and if you're lucky you might even spot the elusive spotted-tailed quoll.

GET INTO IT

Bushwalking: The Great Ocean Walk (100km in its entirety) passes through the national park and small sections can be conquered during your stay with the options of daylong or overnight hikes. Snaking through tall rainforests and coastal heathlands the walk is brimming with native flora and fauna, and bird watching opportunities. With campsites scattered along the trail you will have a number of options once night falls.

Horse riding: The natural beauty of the national park can also be appreciated on horseback through the abundant roads and trails on offer. Some tracks require a horse-riding permit.

Mountain biking: To the north of the park is the small village Forrest, which is surrounded with a

maze-like abundance of mountain bike trails. With a combined total of 60km in trails (including a 12km loop trail) that weave through beautiful bushlands there are options to suit seasoned mountain bike riders to families.

Water sports: The Aire River campground provides a great starting point for kayakers to paddle down the river and into the open ocean. For smaller adventurers, flat sections of the river are ideal for canoeing, while Black Bay has a lot of great rock pools to explore.

In the treetops: Both the Zipline Tour and Treetop Walk allow you to appreciate the ecosystem of the Otway rainforest from a different perspective. The Treetop Walk is a 1.9km walk experience that makes its way through the rainforest, culminating in a 600m-long, 30m-high treetop canopy walkway.

If you prefer the high views and a bit of a rush the Zipline Tour involves flying on a series of cables spanning from one platform to another, 30m above the forest floor. Available for children over four years of age and a minimum of 105cm in height, it is an activity the whole family can enjoy.

Both of these experiences can be booked online.

THE ESSENTIALS

Location: Great Otway National Park is located roughly 200km (a three-hour drive) west of Melbourne. Make the journey along the Great Ocean Road, which hugs the coastline and makes its way through quaint seaside towns. This road itself is worth a couple of days' exploration.

Accommodation: Campsites catering for both caravans and those just wanting to pitch a tent are scattered throughout the park and along the Great Ocean Walk. Advanced bookings and payments are required year-round.

The nearby Apollo Bay offers a variety of accommodation options if you'd prefer to venture into the park for a day trip.

Food/drink: The closest sizeable supermarket is in Apollo Bay. Each campground has different facilities and prior to leaving it is recommended that you check whether there is a fireplace and drinking water available.

Maps: Maps of the national park, its camping sites and the various walking and mountain biking trails can be found on the website and in the visitor information centre.

More info: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/great-otway-national-park



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TECH INFORMATION. IN THIS ISSUE:

PAGE 98: SKILLS: SUP

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PAGE 110: PELICAN CASE

PAGE 111: YAKIMA SWEETROLL

PAGE 112: THULE SPRINT

PAGE 113: GOPRO HERO4 BLACK

Water workout

Stand up paddle is claimed to be the fastest growing watersport in the world, and for good reason.

WORDS DEAN MELLOR

TOP TIP #1

Choose a board that suits your body size and weight, and one that you won't grow out of too quickly.



STAND UP PADDLE (SUP) is said to have originated in Hawaii in around 2004, although there is some fantastic footage on Youtube of surfing legend Duke Kahanamoku riding a wave while standing astride an Australian surf-ski way back in 1939 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPnM4ymNj3o), so in some ways the sport is not entirely new.

In fact from the early 1950s through to the 1970s, the Waikiki Beach Boys used outrigger paddles on their long boards when they were employed to photograph tourists having a crack at surfing.

The modern interpretation of SUP, however, is said to have first appeared in Hawaii around 2000, when there was an extended period of flat swells, and some dedicated surfers thought it'd be a good idea to get out there on their boards with a paddle to keep fit.

Meanwhile, in Australia, it's claimed that SUP was up and running as early as 2003, although it didn't hit the mainstream until the ABC aired a SUP segment on *The 7.30 Report* in May 2007 featuring surfers Tom Carroll and Richie Lovett, among others. From that point on, SUP was on its stellar growth trajectory, with stand up paddle shops popping up all over the country.

"It's the fastest growing watersport in the world," says Nick King from Sunny King Paddleboards. "It's been like that for a few years, because all the other ones have grown, but last summer in America it rated as the most popular land and

sea recreational activity, which is including mountain biking and trekking..."

Nick, who has shaping surfboards for many years, caught the SUP bug about eight years ago and, along with his wife who's a personal trainer, started Sunny King Paddleboards about six-and-a-half years ago. Nick also competes in ironman events, so he can appreciate the many health benefits offered by SUP, as well as the fun aspect of the sport.

WHY IS SUP SO POPULAR?

There are a number of reasons that make SUP popular. "It's very easy for anyone to do it, there's no specific demographic of person that does it, so that's why it's attractive to so many different people," Nick King says.

As well as being easy, and a hell of a lot of fun, proponents of stand up paddle reckon it's the best way to get a thorough, low-impact, cardiovascular workout while having a great time in the water. The combination of balancing and paddling means that you'll use just about every part of your body, yet the design of the board ensures it's relatively easy to balance, so it's suitable for both experienced surfers and those who've never even tried surfing before. It's also suitable for kids, so SUP is a great way to spend a fun day on the water with your family.

"From the cross training side of things, we can [burn] 1200 calories in an hour," claims Nick King. "And from the paddling side of things, it's a non-weight-bearing sport, so

Noland Keaulana competes in the Oxbow stand up paddle expression session November 5, 2010 at Makaha Beach, Hawaii.



TOP TIP #2

Make sure your paddle is the right length or it could spoil your experience.

it's good for the bigger paddlers and bigger people, because like bike riding and swimming, it's also easy on your knees and your joints.

"It's a workout on water. It's a toes to nose workout; it's engaging all different muscles that you're not used to using, but a lot of people are just using it for relaxation and getting out for a bit of a cruise."

The versatility of SUP also makes it popular. "We do inflatable boards for guys with boats, and we sell them to the navy, and there are all sorts of different guys that are using inflatable boards that you can put into a backpack, and they're going up to Cradle Mountain, and doing treks and going paddle boarding in places that have never been seen before," enthuses Nick.

GETTING STARTED

Not all stand up paddle takes place in the surf; in fact it's a very small part of the sport which has split into several different disciplines including, flat-water, touring and competition. There's even stand up paddle yoga! There's a range of different stand up paddleboards specifically designed for the sport's different disciplines, as well as the user's skill level and experience.

If you're just starting out it's a good idea to hire a board and take a lesson or two before you spend up big buying your own equipment. Not only will this be the fastest way to master SUP, it will also ensure you don't end up with a board that's too difficult to handle when you're just starting out, or one that you'll quickly outgrow as you become more experienced and capable.

The other advantage of taking lessons is that you can avoid picking up any bad habits that can adversely affect your technique. Most SUP schools will offer a range of courses ranging from beginners through to advanced. As well as technique, they'll also teach you how to stay safe on the water, and advise what sort of board will best suit your needs, depending on how you intend to use it.

There are SUP schools all over the country, so unless you live away from the coast, or in a remote area, you shouldn't have any trouble finding one. When choosing a school, however, try to speak to people who've done a course with them to get some feedback; as with anything, some SUP schools are better than others.

THE RIGHT BOARD

There are a number of factors that should be taken into account when choosing a board. The first is to find one that suits your body size and weight. For starters, the heavier you are the more floatation you will require so to some degree that will dictate the design of board. But the type of paddling you intend to do will have as big a bearing on board selection as the size and shape of your body.

For example, an all-rounder board can be used either on flat water or in the surf, and it will offer a relatively wide platform for good stability in different conditions. For long-distance paddling or exploring, however, it won't move through the water as easily as a longer, narrower board.

"The main size for people to look at, the biggest seller that we make, is a 10ft 6 board that's 29 or 30 inches wide, so it's



TOP TIP #3

Take a lesson to learn the right technique, as well learning about safety on our waterways.

There's a range of stand up paddleboards specifically designed for the sport's different disciplines, as well as the user's skill level...

**TOP TIP #4**

Use SUP to get a full-body, low-impact workout, but make sure you have fun while you're doing it.

nice and stable," says Nick. "It's still going to hold over 100kg, but for people to get into [the sport], it's initially nice and stable"

Weight is also a big factor in choosing the right board. A 10ft 6 board is under 10kg, so it's going to be easy to throw it up on to the roof of your car, but a bigger board, that's say 14ft and 12 or 13kg, is not going to be as manageable.

Selecting the right paddle is also extremely important. "The paddle height should be about nine inches above your head height," says Nick. "About the time the paddle blade is in the water your top hand is around your forehead, so you've got quite straight arms, you're using your major muscle groups, you're not actually using your arms too much, and it's all forward of your feet, so you're engaging all through your obliques and your stomach muscles, and all through your core, and your quads and also your legs, so it's a good workout."

BOARD CONSTRUCTION

There are two basic board designs: round-nose boards are usually between 9ft 6 and 11ft 6, and are designed as all-rounders suitable for use on flat water and in the surf; and pointy-nose boards are usually around 12ft 6 to 14ft, and are designed more for flat water paddling and racing.

"Construction wise, we use an EPS core which is expandable polystyrene, which is nice and buoyant like a cork," says Nick. "We still have a wood stringer through the board so

Inflatable boards are surprisingly robust, and a similar size to traditional paddleboards.

it's nice and stiff and we put carbon reinforcement through the rails, where the impact zones are, where your paddle's going to be, and your nose and your tail, and also where your foot stance is going to be..."

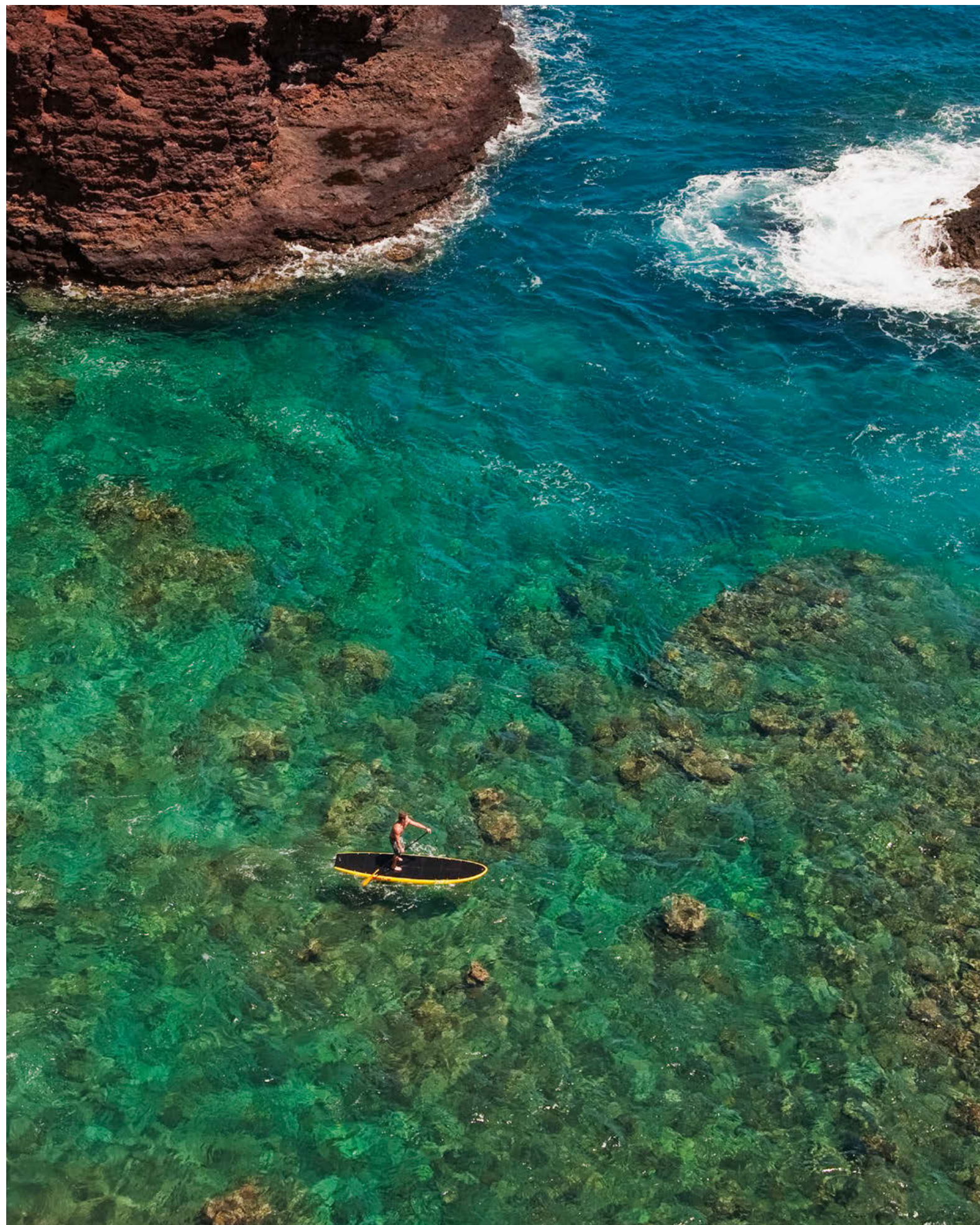
Some manufacturers make soft boards and also use materials such as plastics instead of fibreglass.

For trekking, inflatable boards are surprisingly robust, and a similar size to traditional paddleboards. "The inflatable ones, for guys with boats, or trekking and travelling and stuff, we've got them as a 10ft 6 or a 12ft 6 board," says Nick. "They've got drop-stitching in them so they're nice and stiff, and they've got a three-piece paddle and a foot pump, and a backpack as well, so they can take them anywhere." Nick claims inflatables can be pumped up in as little as two-and-a-half minutes.

DO IT

It's easy to do, it gives you a great workout and it's a lot of fun. Oh, and it can also complement other outdoor activities. If you haven't tried stand up paddle before, perhaps now is the time to have a crack at it.

Above: A stand up paddle rider in the sunset of Waikiki Beach, Hawaii.
Right: Paddling around Pu'u Pehe, Hawaii.

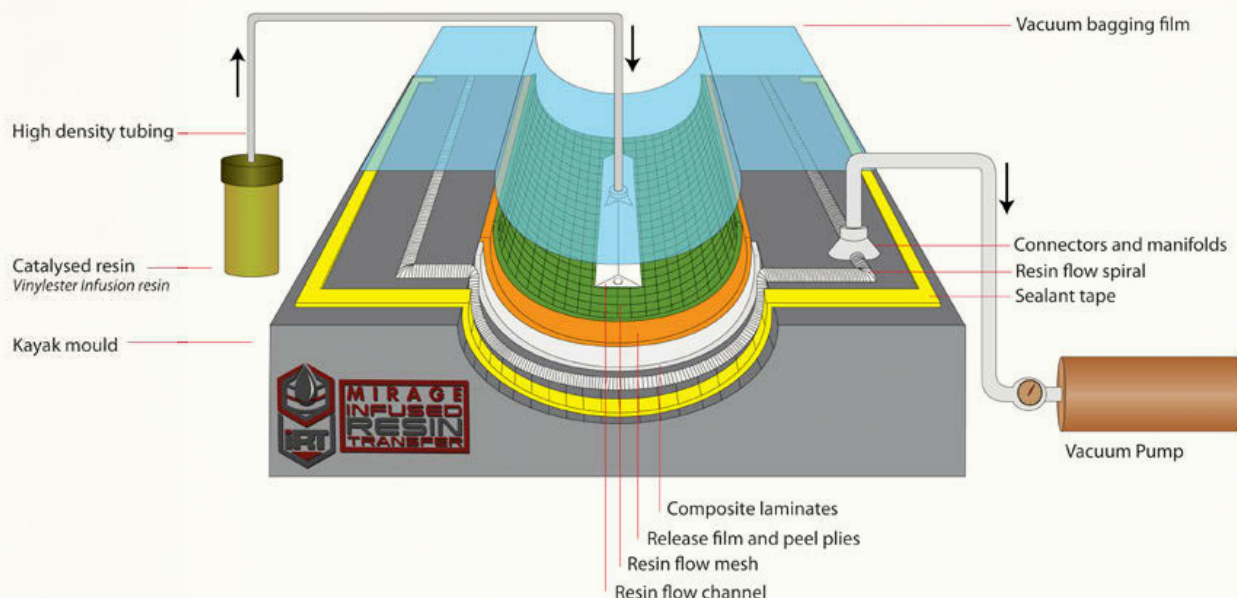


WHAT LIES BENEATH

When you're slicing through the water in your sea kayak, do you ever wonder just what makes your kayak such a smooth mover? We head to Mirage Sea Kayaks' HQ to find out how these top-end sea kayaks are made.

WORDS JUSTIN WALKER PHOTOS JUSTIN WALKER AND MIRAGE KAYAKS





FOR ANY AUSSIE paddler, it is like being the proverbial kid in a lolly shop; I am surrounded by beautiful, sleek Mirage sea kayaks that are just begging to be strapped to my vehicle's roof and taken to my local paddle destination. As much as I would like that to happen, there are two things stopping me: one is Mirage Sea Kayaks' Shannon O'Brien keeping a careful eye on me and his company's display craft; and two, I am actually at Mirage Sea Kayaks HQ to see how the company makes these watercraft. The shiny new sea kayaks around me are, as it turns out, the end result of a lot of hard work from a dedicated team.

PLUG IT IN

Manufacturing a sea kayak is a true case of step-by-step. The start point is like any other type of building process: drawing up a design and then, in the case of sea kayaks, constructing a "plug", which is a physical replica of the kayak design, and from which the mould is created. Traditionally, plugs used to be constructed using a wood and Styrofoam kayak prototype as a base. Now, technology rules – a CAD designer builds the kayak on a computer, then a 3D printer is used in the plug construction process. As Shannon tells me, it allows for exceptional fine-tuning of the kayak design, which can entail only sections of the kayak design, such as the rudder setup, being "built" so the designers can double check dimensions and angles using a physical representation of the final product. The full size

plug is then cut out of a block of solid foam using a five-axis cutting robot. The completed plug is then subject to an intense smoothing process, using a number of different grades of sand paper (similar to the process used when repairing bodywork on vehicles), to achieve a super-smooth finish for the mould process. This process takes a couple of weeks of slow lamination to ensure there is no shrinkage and the mould is a perfect negative of the plug.

BREAKING THE MOULD

From the outside, a kayak mould (actually two separate pieces, for the hull and deck) looks rough, with its many layers of fiberglass and a horizontal flange along its edge. The flange is needed when it comes time to join the two kayak sections together; it is done via bolting, thus the flange is used to secure the bolts effectively.

Inside the mould, it is super smooth; it is this area that will be used to lay the chosen fabrics for the actual kayak itself. The Mirage factory is filled with moulds for each of the company's kayak models (along with separate moulds for the kayakers' seats), as well as rolls of fiberglass, carbon-fibre (a black colour/texture) and the bright yellow of Kevlar. It is when Shannon is showing me the roll of Kevlar (which, in this rolled-up state, wouldn't look out of place in a fabrics shop) that you realise how amazing the entire kayak-making process is. It is hard to get your head around the fact that, when laid-in as part of the build process, this smooth, soft fabric strengthens a kayak considerably.

Above: The diagram above shows the intricacies of the IRT (Infused resin transfer) process used to build some of Mirage's sea kayaks. It looks complex but works brilliantly to produce a lightweight, tough sea kayak.
Below: Tony works his magic.

The Mirage factory is filled with moulds for each of the company's kayaks.



IN A MATERIAL WORLD

The Inuit people are credited with developing the first kayaks, an estimated 4000-4500 years ago.

These craft were a combination of either a wooden or whalebone frame (this depended on the location of the craft-builders; Arctic Inuit primarily used whalebone) covered in animal skin that was stretched over the frame. Little has changed in terms of this basic construction, the main difference being the much wider choice of fabrics. Fibreglass is still the mainstay, and can be found in kayaks using only that fabric, as well as in combination with carbon-fibre and Kevlar.

Carbon-fibre possesses very high tensile strength. When used in combination with fiberglass you can build a kayak that is seriously light in weight, and very rigid, making it fast through the water. The negative of carbon-fibre – especially if you want a full-carbon kayak – is its lack of impact resistance. This can be rectified by laminating the carbon to Innegra to give it the direct impact resistance essential for sea kayaking.

For outright toughness, Kevlar is the material of choice for kayak builders. The ability of Kevlar laminate to “flex” on impact, due to its strong tension qualities, means you are less likely to smash

a hole in your kayak if you hit a rock, for example. It will also need less resin than fiberglass during the build process, thus making it lighter.

Yep, it's a lot more complicated than you would think; ensuring all the layers and fabrics used in a kayak build work in unison to produce a tough, light and high performance sea kayak isn't easy. . .

A CRAFTSMAN'S WORK

When I venture into the manufacturing section of the Mirage factory (all the company's sea kayaks are manufactured in Australia), Shannon introduces me to Tony, who has decades of experience in kayak construction. The kayak he is building, using what is known as the “wet lamination” process, is a fiberglass/Kevlar model.

The wet lamination process is hands-on, and involves the use of a precise amount of resin over the fibre with (ideally) no excess. If you get the ratios of resin to fibre wrong, you get a heavier boat, due to the resin's relative weight. That's why the skill of the kayak builder has a huge influence on the end result. As we watch Tony crafting the kayak, Shannon elaborates.

“The fibres will generally absorb a certain amount of resin to fibre,” Shannon says. “A very

Shannon sums it up when he says, “I don't think people quite realise what goes into their kayak build.”

skilled laminator, with the right materials, will make a beautiful boat. With 20-plus years [of experience], when Tony finishes, that bucket of resin will be empty.”

It's amazing watching Tony work; he has already laid some 'glass layers when he asks me to help spread out the Kevlar layer as he only has a limited time frame with which to work the resin. Once we've spread the fabric he then starts, firstly, brushing resin over the hull interior, then he uses a roller to ensure there are no air bubbles, which can compromise the kayak's strength. He works efficiently and it's interesting seeing what a hands-on process the kayak building is. Shannon sums it up when he says, “I don't think people quite realise what goes into their kayak build.”





Clockwise from left: Tony has more than 20 years of experience building sea kayaks, so knows the precise amount of resin he needs when building each sea kayak; adding a shiny coat; rolling in the resin to ensure there are no air bubbles; fibreglass in its, er, natural form; adding the finishing touches.



There are more “technological” kayak building processes around, including one that Mirage uses called IRT (Infused resin transfer; see diagram, page 105). As the name suggests, this involves infusing the resin into the fabric, via a vacuum-sealing process. This meant a few tweaks to the older kayak moulds as there is need for a wider flange to ensure a better seal with the vacuum, as well as space for the resin flow spiral to run around the edge. Once the vacuum pump and spiral are connected, the vacuum bag is attached via tape, ensuring there are no holes in the seal. Then, the vacuum pulls out the air first from one point, while, at the same time “pulling” the resin through to the spiral on the outside of the mould – not from one point, but evenly throughout the kayak, ensuring the kayak’s materials are evenly infused.

Shannon shows me a sample of a kayak laminate, explaining in more detail how effective the infusion process is.

“This is a laminate of ‘glass, Kevlar and, on the inside, is Soric. Soric is a really interesting material, where it’s a honeycomb effect with foam, so the resin doesn’t infuse the foam, the resin transfers through this pattern,” he says as he traces the honeycomb path on the material. “So in fact your foam... doesn’t have the resin infused into it – it is just coated – so it seals, but the strength is in the negative space [the honeycomb pattern itself].”

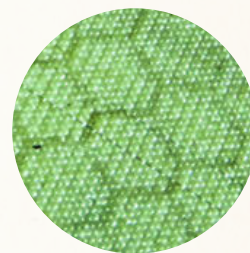
This infusion process is incredibly high-tech – and a huge contrast to Tony’s hands-on method, but with the same end result.

THE END GAME

Once the hull and deck (and seats and bulkheads) are removed from their respective moulds and joined, the kayak is then moved into an area that resembles a smash-repair workshop. I meet Chris in here, who is charged with grinding off the flange joins of the kayak, and smoothing out any imperfections. The join between the hull and deck is then filled, with all kayaks being taped on the inside and, for more expedition-oriented kayaks, on the outside as well. Shannon believes that a well made, and an accurately joined kayak means taping of the join seam is not that necessary, unless you are always paddling in rugged conditions.

From here, the kayak is then moved back into the other workshop for fitment of pedals, rudders and accessories, before being put on the showroom floor, or delivered to a buyer.

Building a sea kayak is an amazingly involved job – more than I would have envisaged before my visit to Mirage Sea Kayaks. So, next time you are paddling your kayak, take the time to pause, enjoy the lapping of the water against your hull, and cast your eyes over the entire craft. There’s a hell of a lot of hard work and passion keeping you afloat.



Top: Enjoying the finished result. It’s a lot of work to produce these sea kayaks but Mirage has built an excellent reputation for its sea kayaks.

Above: The honeycomb effect in this Soric cross-section allows resin to transfer evenly through the material during the IRT process.

Building a sea kayak is an amazingly involved job – more than I would have envisaged before my visit to Mirage’s HQ.



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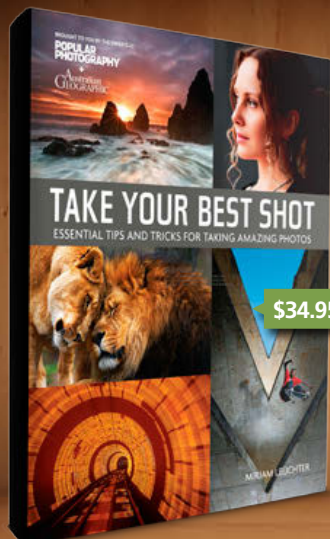
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TESTED BY AG OUTDOOR EDITOR JUSTIN WALKER

ADVENTURE AND ALL things electronic definitely don't go well together. As an adventure/outdoors journalist, keeping my valuable (and essential) digital SLR and laptop computer protected from the elements is of utmost importance.

Pelican cases have been my only choice for the ultimate protection of my DSLR and laptop for one simple reason: over the past five years, the two models I have used – the 1400 and 1470 – have never let me down. My equipment has always come home unscathed, despite my sometimes best, unintended efforts...

The Pelican 1400 and the Pelican 1470 feature watertight, dustproof and crushproof construction, with the inside protective Pick N Pluck foam allowing you to pull out the "shape" you need to fit your equipment, safely cushioned, inside.

The 1400 houses my DSLR and has what Pelican dubs "Double Throw" latches, as well as an O-ring seal and an automatic pressure equalisation valve to ensure zero water ingress. It weighs only 2kg and is claimed to stay buoyant up until it exceeds 9kg in weight. I used the 1400 successfully on a Franklin River, Tasmania rafting expedition. During the nine days on the river, I kept the 1400 case attached to the raft via a climbing carabiner. Inside was the DSLR camera, along with some Peli Desiccant (silica gel) to control humidity inside the case. The camera was easy to access and I had no issues with water ingress the entire trip, even though the case got washed over with water on numerous occasions.

The 1470 has also proved its worth, carrying my MacBook Pro laptop. The best example of just how tough these cases are was when I was packing a Land Rover Defender after a night's camp in the NT's Gulf Country. I had placed the locked (the 1470 features double safety locks) case on the rear seat and promptly forgot it was there – until I went to shove a swag in that area and then watched as the Pelican case sailed at least two metres sideways in the air, before landing loudly on the ground from a height of at least a metre. Amazingly, the laptop fired up straight after. The 1470's O-ring sealing also worked overtime on that trip, keeping the infamously fine-grained outback dust out of the laptop.

After five years of often testing conditions, these cases have proved extremely durable and reliable and, as a result, have become two of my favourite pieces of equipment.





TESTED // YAKIMA SWEETROLL

RRP \$219 www.yakima.com.au

TESTED BY AG OUTDOOR EDITOR JUSTIN WALKER

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, we'd all own a super-lightweight sea kayak of, say, 16kg maximum weight. Unfortunately the ideal is not the reality; most sea kayak owners have to heft craft weighing from around 22kg up to 30kg up on to their roof racks whenever they want to hit the water – not an enviable task, unless you're particularly strong. Yakima Racks' SweetRoll is a solution to that heavy kayak-loading problem.

The SweetRoll is comprised of four padded saddles (two front and two rear) that support (and carry) a kayak on vehicle roof bars (regardless of brand) and can be fitted sans tools in around 10 minutes. The difference between the SweetRoll and the myriad other kayak holders out there is the integrated rollers in each rear saddle (when fitting, make sure the rollers are facing rearward).

The (lockable) saddles sit atop a spring-loaded base, while the tilting flat saddle area adjusts to fit to any hull shape. When loading your kayak, you simply have to align the craft with the rear rollers and push it on – the rollers do the rest of the load bearing. This saves you having to grunt and strain, pushing the kayak forward and trying not to scratch the base of it.

Once you've got the kayak rolled into position, you just have to adjust the saddles for optimum fit and then tie it down. Yakima supplies heavy-duty straps and bow and stern tie-down straps with the SweetRoll kit, so you don't have to buy extra equipment to make it all work.

The SweetRoll has been used on and off over the summer and so far so good. It is excellent value for money with everything you need included and the speed of fitment – for both the SweetRoll saddles and the kayak – plus the fact it takes a significant weight off when you're fitting the kayak, makes it well worth considering for any paddler.



WIN!

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TESTED // THULE SPRINT 528 WRAP-AROUND

RRP \$399.00 www.thule.com.au

TESTED BY AG OUTDOOR EDITOR JUSTIN WALKER

IT'S A TERRIBLE, terrible sound. That squeak or, worse, a crack that alerts you to the fact you've just snapped your bike's fork by over-tightening the fork mount on your bike carrier. It usually results in tears.

With its all-new Sprint, Thule has sought allay the fears of those using fork-mounted bike carriers, wondering how far to tighten the fork mount. The Sprint is available in T-Lock and Wrap-around configurations, and we're testing the Wrap-around version.

The rack is fitted via Thule's Speed-Link mount system, which is two straps that are ratcheted tight around your roof bars – meaning no more messing about with tools. It's super-quick and super secure once mounted and locked on. The Sprint also fits all Thule bars, plus those of other brands, thanks mainly to this innovative new fitment system.

The Speed-Link setup in itself is cool, but the standout feature of the Sprint is undoubtedly its AcuTight technology, which ensures that no matter how keen you are when tightening the fork mount to your fork, you cannot over-tension it. Mounting is simple: you twist the AcuTight knob (a bullet shaped knob at the front of the carrier) until optimal torque is reached, and then its inbuilt clutch emits a "click" stopping any further tensioning. Then it's just a matter of ratcheting down the wheel straps (after moving the telescopic wheel tray to its desired position) and

you're done. Yep, it's that easy – and that reassuring.

The Sprint is a relatively low-profile design and also quite light thanks to its aluminium tray. The telescoping tray also allows you to slide the back end of it in, reducing the chance of banging it with your rear hatch if you own a 4WD or hatchback.

I've been using the Sprint for a couple of weeks and it has so far proven foolproof in operation... and fork preservation. The only thing I struggled with, initially, was how to pack the front wheel in the car to avoid damaging it when it's jammed in with luggage. Thankfully, Thule solves this problem as well; the Thule padded Wheelbag 563XL (RRP \$61) can take wheels up to 29-inch in size.

The Sprint certainly ain't cheap – I reckon Thule should throw in the Wheelbag and the (optional) rack key locks as part of the package to add value – but the excellent build quality and unique design make the asking price a bit easier to swallow.

At the time of going to press, I was busy planning the annual Walker jaunt down to the NSW Sapphire Coast for Christmas. The Sprint will see heavy use here as I am taking my carbon-fibre road bicycle down to sample some coastal riding. I can now feel a lot more confident that the bike – and especially the front fork – will be well protected. Look for a long-term test of the Thule Sprint 528 in a future issue.



HOT FEATURES

HI-DEF 4K FOOTAGE
TOUGH BUILD
EASE OF USE



TESTED // GOPRO HERO 4 BLACK

RRP \$639 www.gopro.com

TESTED BY CAROLYN BARRY

THE PHENOMENALLY successful GoPro juggernaut has delivered once again with its latest upgrade, the Hero 4. We tested the black, which GoPro boasts is the most advanced of its line-up yet, but you can also opt for the silver version, with inbuilt touch screen, but not as high quality specs (though still more than enough) (RRP \$509).

GoPro hasn't messed with the form of the Hero 4, keeping the body to its normal small size and compatibility with its previous housing and accessories. It does have a new battery size and a different slot (bottom rather than side), so this isn't compatible with older versions. The biggest change is the quality of the footage, though you do pay for it, with the price of GoPros starting to creep up.

For serious filmmakers, the Hero 4 boasts cinema-quality, ultra high-definition 4K video with 30fps and 2.7K with 50fps. Even better, you can retrieve 8.3MP images from the video, which means you don't have to choose what format in which to capture your key moments. But high quality filming means you'll chew through the batteries, so get some spares.

You can shoot 1080p with 120fps for full HD slow motion, and capture photos at 30 frames per second bursts. There's a night-shooting setting of up to 30s shutter exposure for capturing activities in the dark.

The video quality is impressive, even against the Hero 3. Underwater shots are clearer and land/air shots are crisp.

The Hero 4 models come with Protune, which allows you to have much more choice of film settings, such as ISO, colour, white balance, sharpness and raw format. GoPro has also improved its audio quality so it doesn't fall behind the visuals too much.

As always, you have the dual-button system for selecting settings if you don't have the LCD pack (which does suck the battery), but with the added convenience of an extra little button on the side for altering the settings within the mode you're in. You can also use this button to tag a moment, so you don't have to trawl through endless hours of footage to find it later.

It has faster Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity for using the remote or the GoPro app on your iPhone.

Who needs a standard video camera when you have this little beauty that can fit into your pocket?



Who: Sabina Peacock

Where: Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado, USA

Photographer: Andrew Peacock
www.footloosefotography.com

Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado, USA, boasts the tallest sand dunes in North America, near the towering peaks of the Sangre de Cristo range. On the recommendation of a landscape photographer from the area, I changed plans to travel somewhere new to me, with the aim of photographing a unique and diverse environment.

The trick to this photo was finding a dune untrodden by the many visitors the park receives and where the setting sun would throw dramatic shadows across the ridges. That took some doing, but luckily, my long suffering wife, Sabina, was up to the task as we had to move quickly across soft,

steep dunes to reach the place I scoped out from the parking area before sunset. In summer the sand temperature can reach 60°C making footwear mandatory, but on this cooler autumn evening, bare feet were perfect.

As well as hiking; renting a sandboard to slide down the dunes is a big attraction for both children and adventurous adults. The vast surrounding wilderness provides other activities for the outdoor enthusiast, such as horse riding and wildlife watching, with many elk roaming the area. A creek at the base of the dunes is a great spot for a refreshing dip at the end of the day.



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Sleeping Mats



Air Sprung Cells™ are independent air chambers that conform to your body's contours without affecting adjacent cells. They allow uniform pressure distribution for unsurpassed comfort.

Dual layer construction uses two offset independent high resolution layers. The **Comfort Plus** range provides the most effective system for fine tuning the level of comfort. Using the fine tune valve you can adjust the pressure in the upper layer to feel softer and more comfortable. The Dual Layer design also has **built in redundancy**.



Multi-functional, high flow-rate valve allows easy inflation, rapid deflation and fine tuning for comfort.



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Award winning design